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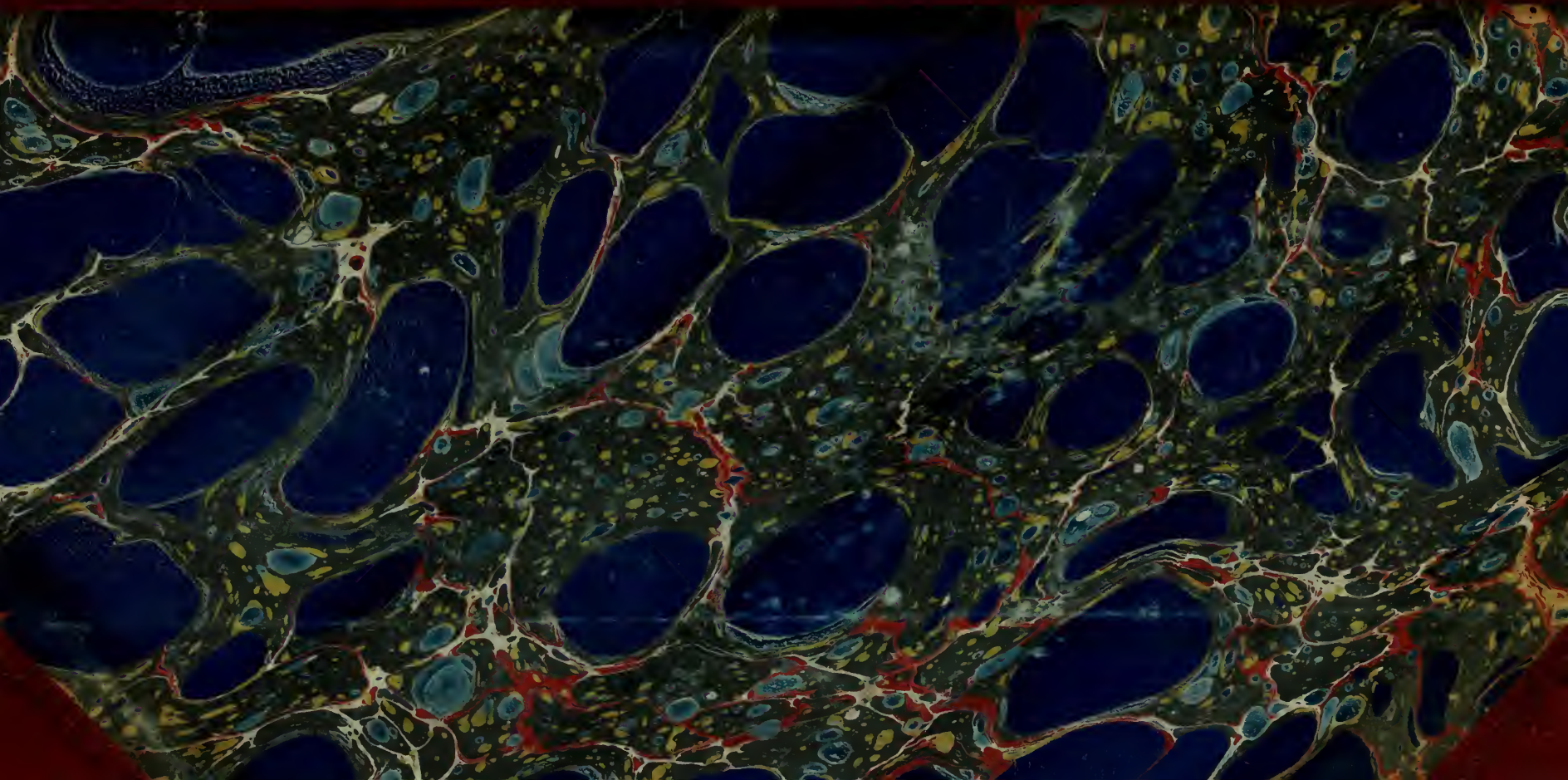

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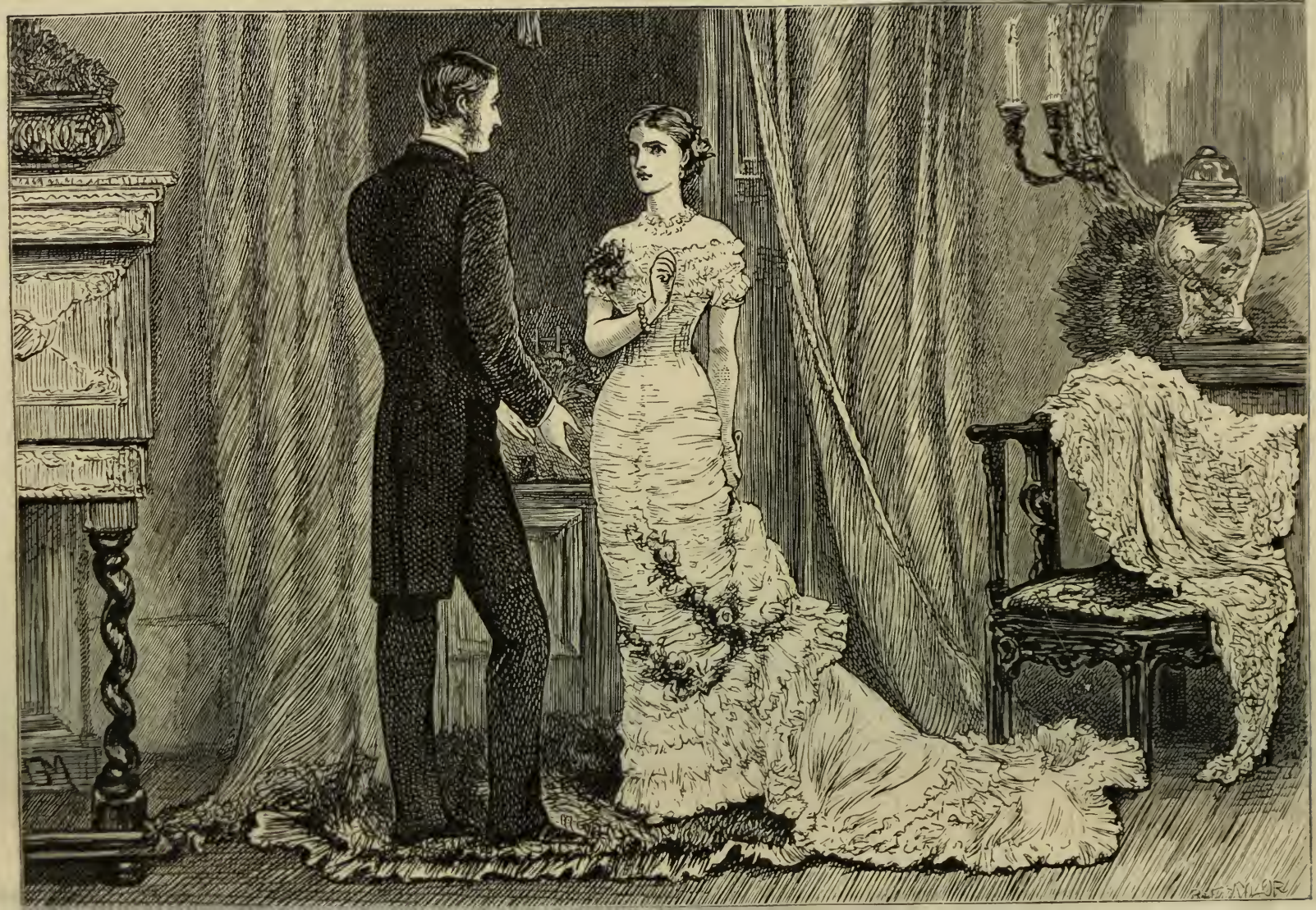

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD.

VOLUME XXXII.

July to December, 1881.

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THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1881.

COURT NETHERLEIGH.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XIX.

GIVEN INTO CUSTODY.

THEY sat at the well-spread dessert-table in Grosvenor Square, those two gentlemen, the sole partners of almost the wealthiest house in London; keen, honourable, first-rate men of business, yet presenting somewhat of a contrast in themselves. He at the table's head, Francis Grubb, was fine and stately, wearing in his countenance, in its expression of form and feature the impress of true nobility—nature's nobility, not that of the peerage—and young yet. James Howard, who might be called the chief partner, so far as work and constant, regular attendance in the City went, though he did not receive anything like an equal share of the profits, was an elderly man, short and stout, his face hard and stern, his hair iron gray, and his black coat rusty. Mr. Howard had walked up from his house in Russell Square this evening to confer with his chief upon some matter of business. It a little surprised Mr. Grubb: for, with them, business discussions were always confined to their legitimate province—the City.

The Lady Adela, Mr. Grubb's rebellious but very charming wife, quitted the room speedily, leaving them to the discussion that Mr. Howard had intimated he wished for. But Mr. Howard did not show himself in any haste to enter upon it. He sat on, surveying abstractedly the glittering table before him, with its rich cut glass, its silver, its china, and its sweet flowers, talking—abstractedly also—of the passing topics of the day, more particularly of a political meeting which had taken place that afternoon. Mr. Grubb was a Conservative; he a Liberal; or, as it was more often styled in those days, Tory and Whig.

"What news is it that you have brought me, Howard?" began Mr. Grubb at last, breaking a pause of silence.

"Aye—my news," returned Mr. Howard, as though recalled to the

thought. "Did you draw a cheque on Saturday morning, before leaving home, in favour of self, and get it cashed at Glyn's?"

Mr. Grubb threw his thoughts back on Saturday morning. The reminiscence was unpleasant. The scene which had taken place with his wife was painful to him, disgraceful to her. He had drawn no cheque.

"No," he answered, thinking a vast deal more of that scene than of Mr. Howard's question.

"A cheque for five hundred pounds, in favour of self?" continued Mr. Howard, slowly sipping his port wine.

"I don't draw at Glyn's in favour of self. You know that, Howard, as well as I do." Messrs. Glyn and Co. were the bankers of the firm; Coutts and Co. the private bankers of Mr. Grubb.

"Just so. Therefore, upon the fact coming to our notice this afternoon that such a cheque had been drawn and paid, I stepped over to Glyn's and made inquiries."

"How did it come to your notice?"

"This way. John Strasfield had all the cheques, drawn last week, sent to him for the usual purpose of verification—he has his own ways of doing his business, you know. In looking over them he was rather struck with this cheque, because it was drawn to self. Self, too; not selves. After regarding it for a minute or two, another thought struck him—that the signature was not quite like yours. So he brought the cheque to me. I don't think you signed it."

Mr. Grubb rose and closed the door, which he had left ajar after opening it for Lady Adela, the evening being very warm. John Strasfield was their confidential cashier in Leadenhall Street.

"If it is your signature, your hand must have been nervous when you wrote it," continued Mr. Howard, "rendering the letters less decided than usual."

That Mr. Grubb had been nervous on Saturday morning he was quite conscious of; though not, he believed, to the extent of making his hand unsteady. But he had not drawn any cheque.

"It was drawn in favour of self, you say. Was it signed with my private signature, Francis C. C. Grubb?"

"No; with the firm's signature, Grubb and Howard. Glyn's people suspected nothing wrong, and cashed it."

"Who presented the cheque?"

"Charles Cleveland. And he received the money."

"Charles Cleveland!" repeated Mr. Grubb in surprise, his whole attention fully aroused now. "There is some mystery about this."

"So it seemed to me," answered the elder man. "Cleveland stayed out of town to-day—by your leave I think you said."

"Yes, he asked me on Saturday to let him have to-day; he was going down to Netherleigh: his elder brother, Captain Cleveland, meant to run down there to say good-bye. Charles will be back to-night, I suppose. But—I don't understand about this cheque."

"I'm sure I don't," said Mr. Howard. "Except that Charles Cleveland got it cashed."

"Where did Charles Cleveland procure the cheque?" asked Mr. Grubb, his head all in a puzzle. "Who drew the cheque? Where's the money? Howard, there must be some mistake in your information."

"It was Saturday morning that you left the cheque book at home, and sent Cleveland for it, if you remember," said Mr. Howard, quietly.

"Ah, to be sure it was; I do remember. A long while he was gone."

"You asked him what made him so long I chanced to be in your room at the moment: and he said he had been doing a little errand for himself. Well, during that period of his absence, that is, somewhere between ten and half-past eleven, the cheque was presented by him at Glyn's, and cashed. What does it all say?" concluded Mr. Howard.

Francis Grubb looked a little bewildered. No clear idea upon the point was suggesting itself to his mind.

"I thought young Cleveland was given to improvident habits," resumed Mr. Howard, "but I never suspected he was one to help himself to money in this way; to ——"

"He *cannot* have done it," interrupted Mr. Grubb, earnestly decisive. "It is quite impossible. Charles Cleveland is foolish and silly enough, just as boys will be, for he is no better than a boy; but he is honest and honourable."

"Are you aware that he spends a great deal of money?"

"I think he does. I said so to him last week. It was that pouring wet day, Wednesday, I think, and I told him he might go down to Leadenhall Street with me in the carriage if he liked. I took the opportunity of speaking to him about his expenditure, telling him it was a great deal easier to get into debt than to get out of it."

"Which he had found out for himself, I expect," grumbled Mr. Howard. "How did he receive it?"

"As ingenuously as you could wish. Blushed like a school-girl. He confessed that he had been spending too much money lately, and laid it chiefly to the score of his brother's being in London. Captain Cleveland's comrades are rather an expensive set; the allowance that he gets from his uncle is good; and Charles has been led into expense through mixing with them. The very moment his brother left, he said, he should draw in and spend next to nothing."

Mr. Howard smiled grimly. "One evening, strolling out after my dinner, I chanced to meet the young gentleman, came full upon him as he was turning out of a florist's, a big bouquet of white flowers in his hand. 'You must have given a guinea for that, young sir,' I said to him, and he did not deny it; just leaped into a cab and was off. I don't suppose those flowers were for Captain Cleveland or for any of his comrades."

Mr. Grubb knitted his brow. He had not the slightest doubt they were for his wife. What a silly fellow that Charley was!

"He may get into debt; I feel sure he is in debt; but he would not commit forgery—or help himself to money that was not his. I tell you, Howard, the thing is impossible."

"He presented the cheque and received the money," dryly remarked Mr. Howard. "What has he done with it?"

"But no one, not even a madman, would go to work in this barefaced way," contended his more generous-minded partner, "conscious that it must bring immediate detection and punishment down upon his head."

"Detection, yes; punishment does not necessarily follow. That, he may be already safe from."

"How do you mean?"

"Suppose you inquire what clothes he took with him," suggested Mr. Howard. "My impression is that he's off. Gone! The Netherleigh tale may have been only a blind."

Mr. Grubb rose and rang the bell, staggered nearly out of his senses; and, until it was answered, not another word was spoken. Each gentleman was busy with his own thoughts.

"Richard," began the master to his servant, "when Mr. Charles Cleveland left for the country yesterday morning, did he take much luggage with him?"

"Don't think he took any, sir; unless it was his small portmanteau."

"Did you happen to hear him say whether he intended to make a long stay?"

"I did not hear him say anything, sir. But Mr. Cleveland is back."

"Back!" echoed Mr. Howard, surprised into the interference.

"He came back half an hour ago, sir, and went out again as soon as he had dressed. The cab waited for him. He is gone to dine at the Army and Navy."

"Then no elucidation can now take place until morning," observed Mr. Grubb, as the servant withdrew. "When he has gone out lately on these dining bouts he does not get home till late, sometimes not at all. But rely upon it, Howard, this matter will be cleared up satisfactorily, so far as he is concerned. Though what the mystery attending the cheque can be, I am unable to imagine."

"I am sure I am, looking at it from your point of view," returned the elder man. "See here: you come down to Leadenhall Street on Saturday morning, and find you have left the cheque book of the firm at home here. You send Charles Cleveland for it, telling him to take a cab and to make haste. After being away three or four times as long as he need be, he comes back with the cheque book, having found it, he says, where you had told him it probably would be found—in the room where you breakfasted. He does not account

for his delay, except by the excuse that he was doing an errand for himself, and begs pardon for it. Well and good. To-day we find that a cheque has been abstracted from that same cheque book, filled in for five hundred pounds, and was cashed by Cleveland himself, all during this same interval on Saturday morning, when he declines to account for his time. What do you make of it?"

Put thus plainly before him, Mr. Grubb did not know what to make of it, and his faith in Charles Cleveland began to waver. The most prejudiced mind cannot altogether fight against palpable facts. Mr. Howard opened his pocket book, took the cheque in question from it, and laid it, open, before his senior partner.

"This is not Cleveland's writing," remarked Mr. Grubb.

"Of course not. It is an imitation of yours. That is not his ordinary handwriting. He has done it pretty cleverly. Glyns were deceived. Not but that I consider Glyn's clerk was incautious not to see the difference between 'self' and 'selves.' He says he did not notice the word at all: but he ought to have noticed it."

"It is a singular affair altogether," observed Mr. Grubb, in a musing tone. "To begin with, my bringing home the cheque book at all was singular. You were not in the City on Friday, you know, Howard, and ——"

"I couldn't come when I'd got the cholic," grunted out Mr. Howard.

"My dear, good, old friend, do you suppose I thought you could?" answered Mr. Grubb, checking a laugh. "I was going to say that, as you were absent, I signed the cheques on Friday, and the book lay on my desk. It happened that my private cheque book also lay there. When I left, I put the firm's cheque book in my pocket by mistake and locked up the other; meaning, of course, to do just the contrary. But for this carelessness on my part, Charles Cleveland would not have had the opportunity of—good heavens! What a blow this will be for his father! We must hush it up."

"Hush it up!" cried out the other and sterner man of business. "Not if I know it. That's just like you, Francis Grubb! Your uncle Francis, my many years' friend, used to accuse you, you know, of having a soft place in your heart."

"I am thinking of that good man, with his many cares, the Rector of Netherleigh."

"And I am thinking of his son's bold, barefaced iniquity. Be you very sure of one thing, sir—Glyns won't hush it up; they are the wrong people to do it. Neither must you. A pretty example it would be! No, thank you, no more wine; I have had my quantity."

"Well, well, we shall see, Howard. I cannot understand it yet."

When Mr. Grubb got upstairs that night, he found his wife gone out, leaving no message for him. She never did leave any. Davvy thought her lady had gone to the opera. Mr. Grubb followed, and found her there. The box was full, and there was little room for him. He said nothing to her of what had occurred: he meant to keep it

from her if he could, to save her pain; and from all others, for the Honourable and Reverend Mr. Cleveland's sake.

Mr. Grubb sat down to breakfast the next morning alone. Lady Adela had not risen; Charles Cleveland did not make his appearance.

"Does Mr. Charles Cleveland know I am at breakfast, Hilson?" he inquired of the butler, who was in attendance.

"Mr. Charles Cleveland left word—I beg your pardon, sir, I forgot to mention it—that he has gone out to breakfast with his brother, Captain Cleveland, who sails to-day for India. He went out between six and seven."

"He came home last night, then?"

"Yes, sir; about one o'clock."

Mr. Grubb glanced over the letters waiting in a stack by his plate, some for himself, some for Lady Adela. Amidst the former was one from his sister, written on Saturday. Her mother (who had been ill for some time) was much worse, she said, and she begged her brother to come down, if possible, on Monday morning.

It chanced that Mr. Grubb had made one or two appointments for people to see him that morning at his house; so that it was eleven o'clock when he reached Leadenhall Street.

"Well, where is he?" began Mr. Howard, without ceremony of greeting.

"Where's who?" asked Mr. Grubb.

"Charles Cleveland."

"What—is he not come yet?" returned Mr. Grubb, whose thoughts had been elsewhere.

"Not yet. I don't think he means to."

To be late, or in any other way inattentive to his duties, had not been one of Charley's sins. Therefore his absence was the more remarkable. Mr. Grubb started for Blackheath, almost endorsing Mr. Howard's opinion that the delinquent had embarked with his brother for India, or for some other place not speedily accessible to officers of justice.

Twelve o'clock was striking by St. Paul's when Charley bustled in, hot, and out of breath. He was told that Mr. Howard wanted him.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for being so late," he panted, addressing himself to that gentleman, when he reached his private room, "especially after my holiday of yesterday. I went early this morning to Woolwich, and on board ship with my brother, intending to be back by business hours; but, what with one delay and another, I was unable to get up till now."

"It is not business-like at all, sir," growled the old merchant. "But—stay a bit, Mr. Cleveland; we have a few questions to put to you."

Charles glanced round. In his hurry he had seen no one but Mr. Howard. His eye now fell on a little man, who sat in a corner. Charley knew him to be connected with Glyn's house; and he knew

that the time was at hand when he would have need of all his presence of mind and his energies. It chanced that this gentleman had just come in to know if anything had come to light about the mysterious cheque.

"You presented a cheque for five hundred pounds at Glyn's on Saturday morning, and received the amount in notes," began Mr. Howard. "From whom did you get that cheque?"

No reply.

"Purporting to be drawn and signed by Mr. Grubb. I ask from whom you received it?"

"I decline to answer," Charles said at length, speaking with hesitation, in spite of his preparation for firmness.

"Do you deny having presented the cheque?"

"No. I do not deny that."

"Do you deny having received the money for it?" interposed the gentleman from the bank.

"Nor that, either. I acknowledge to have received five hundred pounds. It would be waste of folly to deny it," continued Charles to him, in a sort of calm desperation, "since your clerk could prove the contrary."

"But did you know what you were laying yourself open to?" cried Mr. Howard, evidently in a maze of astonishment, for he took these admissions of Charles's to be tantamount to an absolute acknowledgment of his guilt.

"I know now, sir."

"Will you refund the money?" asked Mr. Howard, dropping his voice; for that stern man of business had been going over the affair half the night as he lay in bed, and concluded to give the reckless young fellow a chance. Truth to say, Mr. Howard's bark was always worse than his bite. "Out of consideration for your family, connected, as it is, with that of the head of our firm, we are willing to be lenient; and if you will confess, and refund ——"

"I cannot refund, and I must decline to answer any more questions," interrupted Charles, fast relapsing into agitation.

Mr. Howard stared at him. "Do you understand, young man, what it is that you would bring upon your head? In point of fact, we are laying ourselves open to, I hardly know what penalty of law, in making you this offer; but Mr. Grubb is so anxious it should be hushed up for your father's sake—whom everybody respects. If you decline it; if you set me at defiance—as, it seems to me, you wish to do—I shall have no resource but to give you into custody."

"I beg to state that the matter is not in our hands yet," spoke up the banker to Charles. "If it were, we could not make you any such offer. Though, of course, we can fully understand and appreciate the motives that actuate your principals, with whom the affair at present wholly rests. It would be a terrible blow on the Cleveland family; and everyone must wish to save them from it."

"I—I am very sorry," gasped Charles, feeling all this to his heart's core. "Unfortunately ——"

"The matter is not known beyond ourselves," interposed Mr. Howard again, indicating himself and the banker; "and it need not be. But it is solely out of consideration for your family, you understand, that we offer to hush it up. Will you explain?"

"I cannot. Unfortunately, I cannot, sir. It is not in my power."

"Then I give you in charge at once."

"I can't help it," said poor Charles, passing his hand over his hot brow.

Mr. Howard, very hard, very uncompromising, when deliberately provoked, was as good as his word. And Charles Cleveland was given into custody for forgery.

CHAPTER XX.

"THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH US IN AFTER LIFE."

It was all over and done with long before Mr. Grubb got up from Blackheath in the afternoon. He felt terribly vexed. Vexed for Charles himself, terribly vexed for Charles's family, vexed on his own score. To his refined and sensitive mind, it almost seemed that he had violated the sacred laws of hospitality, for Charles had been staying, as a guest, in his house.

The first thing he did was to hasten to the prison to which Charles had been conveyed, preparatory to his examination on the morrow. The young man was in his cell, sitting on the edge of his narrow bed, and looking very down-hearted. The entrance of Mr. Grubb seemed to bring to him a sudden flash of hope. He started up.

"Oh, sir," he exclaimed, in high excitement, "will you not look over this one error? My father will replace the money—I am sure he will, rather than suffer this public disgrace to fall upon the family. Do not force the shame upon him. And—and there's my brother—just embarked—what will he do? Oh, Mr. Grubb, if you will but have mercy!"

"Charles—don't excite yourself like this—I am come here to offer you the mercy," spoke Mr. Grubb; and his considerate manner, his voice of music, were just like a healing balm. "I am come straight from Mr. Howard to renew the offer he made you. It is not yet too late: we will make things right to-morrow: there will be no prosecutor, you understand. Will you give me, myself only, the particulars you denied to Mr. Howard?"

Just for one eager moment the wish flashed across Charles's mind that he might tell the truth to this good man. Was he not Adela's husband, and would he not excuse her in his love? The next, he saw how futile was the wish. Could *he* be the one to betray her?—and to her husband? Shame upon him for the thought! He had

vowed to her to hold her harmless, and he would do so for her sake.

"To me it appears that there's a mystery in the affair which I cannot fathom," continued Mr. Grubb. "Your conduct in it is perfectly incomprehensible. It may be better for you to confide in me, Charles."

"I cannot, sir. I wish I could."

"What if I tell you that, in spite of appearances, I do not myself believe you guilty?"

A bright, eager flush, a glance of *understanding* illumined for a moment Charley's face. It seemed to say that just, honourable natures know and trust in each other's innocence, no matter what may be the surrounding signs of guilt. But the transient expression faded away to sadness, and Mr. Grubb was in doubt whether it had really been there.

"I can explain nothing," said the prisoner. "I can only thank you, sir, for this proof of confidence, and implore your clemency on the ground of compassion alone."

"Charles Cleveland, this won't do. You are either guilty or innocent. Which is it?"

"Guilty, of course," said Charley in his desperation. For, if he said "innocent," the next rejoinder would be "Then who is guilty?" And he could not answer that, or any other close question.

"Did you do this vile thing of your own accord; or were you induced to do it by another?" pursued Mr. Grubb, his head running upon Charley's debts and Charley's fast companions.

"I—I—pray do not ask me more, sir! It is a wretched business, and I must suffer for it."

"Am I to understand that you wholly refuse to confide in me?—refuse to be helped? I would be your true friend."

"I *must* refuse," gasped poor Charley. "I have nothing to tell. I did present the cheque at Glyn's, and I drew the money. And—and I hope you will forgive me, sir, for I am very miserable."

"Is all the money spent?"

"I—I have not got as much as a shilling of it. If I had, I'd give it back. It's too late."

Nothing better than this could Mr. Grubb wring from the unfortunate prisoner. And he left him *believing he was guilty*. He left in rather an angry mood, too, for he thought Charles was bearing out Mr. Howard's report and showing himself defiantly, ungratefully obstinate. That he had been in some most pressing and perhaps dangerous difficulty on the Saturday morning, and had used these desperate means to extricate himself, must be, he concluded, the fact. A great deal of his compassion for Charles melted away; the young man seemed hardened.

On the following morning the case was taken before the magistrates. It was heard in private. The influential house, Grubb and Howard, could have commanded a greater concession than that.

One magistrate only sat, a very pliable one, Sir Turtle Kite. The case was but slightly gone into, the prosecutors asking for a week's remand: they wished to trace out more particulars, also wished to trace the notes. At the end of that time the prisoner would be brought up again; and meanwhile he was consigned to that awful place, Newgate.

In spite of all efforts to keep it secret, the affair partially got wind. Not, however, in its true details. All kinds of exaggerated rumours and surmises ran the rounds of the clubs. But for the recent sojourn of Captain Cleveland in London, Charley might have remained quite an obscure individual, as regarded the fashionable world. But he had been a great deal with his brother, and was known and liked everywhere.

What a commotion arose! Charles Cleveland in Newgate on a charge of robbery, or forgery, or what not! Charley Cleveland the popular—Charley Cleveland, the grandson of an earl gathered to his fathers, and nephew of one who stood in his shoes—Charley Cleveland, the out-and-out good fellow, who was wont to scare the blue devils away from everybody—Charley Cleveland, who, in defiance of his improvidence and his shallow pocket, was known to be of the nicest honour amongst the honourable!

"The thing's preposterous altogether," stuttered John Cust, who had a natural stammer. "If Charley had drawn the money he would have had the money, and I know that on Saturday afternoon he had not a rap, for he borrowed three sovs. of me to take him down to Brighton ——"

"Netherleigh, Cust."

"Netherleigh, then. What put Brighton in my head, I wonder? Fancy he went to try and get some money out of his governor."

"Which he did," added Lord Deerhum. "A five-pound note."

"And paid me back the three on the Monday night, when he came to his brother's spread at the Rag and Famish," continued John Cust. "Gammon! Charley has not been making free with anybody's name."

"But he acknowledges to having drawn the money," squeaked Booby Charteries. "A thousand pounds, they say."

"You may take that in yourself, Booby. We don't."

"But the Lord Mayor ——"

"Lord Mayor be hanged! If he swears till he's black in the face that Charley did it, I know he didn't. There."

"'Twasn't the Lord Mayor. Some other one of those City big-wigs."

"Anyway, he is in Newgate. It's said, too, that it is Grubb and Howard who have sent him there."

"Did he rob their cash-box?"

"Do they accuse him of it, you mean, Booby. As if Charley would do such a thing!"

"Let us go down to Newgate, and have a smoke with him," cried

Charteries, who had so small a share of brains and so very small a voice as to have acquired the nickname Booby. "It may cheer the fellow up, under the present alarming state of things."

"As if they'd admit us inside Newgate, or a smoke either!" retorted John Cust. "There's only one thing more difficult than getting into Newgate, and that is, if you are in, getting out again. Don't forget that, Booby."

"Couldn't some of us go and punch a few heads down there, beginning with old Howard's," again proposed Booby. "I don't say Grubb's."

"Grubb has had nothing to do with bringing the charge; you may rely upon that," said Lord Deerhum. "Grubb's a gentleman. You shut up, Booby."

Ah! it was all very well for these idle, foolish young men to express their sympathy with the prisoner in their idle, foolish way: but, what of the distress of those connected with him?

Thomas Cleveland, Honourable and Reverend, heard from his wife, who was still staying at her mother's, that something was amiss, and came up from Netherleigh to find his son incarcerated in Newgate and accused of forgery. Down he went to the prison at once, and got admission. Charley looked, in that short period, greatly changed. His dress was neglected, his hair unkempt, and his face haggard. Charley, the fastidious!

Mr. Cleveland was overcome beyond control, and sobbed aloud. He was a venerable-looking man of nearly sixty years now, and had always been a fond father. Charley was little less affected.

"Why did you not kill me when you last came down, Charles?" he moaned out in his perplexity and anguish. "Better have put me out of this world of pain than bring this misery upon me. Oh, my boy! my boy! you were your mother's favourite: how can you so have disgraced her memory?"

"I would I had been put out of the world, rather than be the curse to you I have proved," writhed Charley, wishing Newgate would yawn asunder and engulph him. "Oh, don't—father, don't!" he implored, as Mr. Cleveland's sobs echoed through the cell. "If it will be any consolation to you to know it, I will avow to you that I am not guilty," he added, the sight of his father's affliction momentarily outweighing his precaution. "By all your care of me, by your present grief, by the memory of my dead mother, I swear to you that I am not guilty."

Mr. Cleveland looked up, and his heart leaped within him. He knew Charles was speaking truth. It was impossible to mistake that earnest tone.

"Thank God!" he murmured. "But what, then, is this I hear, about your declining to make a defence?" he presently asked. "I am told you have as good as acknowledged your guilt." Charles hung his head, and relapsed into prudence again.

"My boy, answer me. How came you to accept—as it were—the charge, if you are innocent?"

"For your private comfort I have said this, dear father, but it must remain between us as if it had not been spoken. The world must still, and always, believe me guilty."

"But why?—why? What mystery is this?"

"Do not ask me, sir. Believe that you have not a son more free from the guilt of this crime than I am. Nevertheless, I must pay the penalty, for I cannot defend myself."

Mr. Cleveland thought this about the most extraordinary thing he had ever met with. Nothing more could he get out of Charles; nevertheless, he did believe in his innocence. From Newgate he went on to Leadenhall Street, to see the gentlemen who had brought this charge, and found only one of them in: Mr. Grubb.

"You are not more pained at the affair than I am," said the latter, closing the door of his private room, "and certainly not more astonished."

"Oh, Mr. Grubb," cried the clergyman, "could you not have hushed this wretched disgrace up, for all our sakes? or at least made more inquiries before taking these extreme steps? You who have shown so much true friendship for me!"

"I would have hushed it up. I wished to hush it up altogether. I would have paid the money over and over again out of my own pocket, rather than it should have become known, even to Mr. Howard. It was he, however, who brought the tidings of it to me."

"And Mr. Howard would not?"

"Mr. Howard would. At first he seemed inclined to be hard. Thorough business men look upon these things with a stern eye. However, he knew my wishes, and came to. He was the first to speak to Charles. He asked him to acknowledge the truth to him, and he would forgive it. Charles refused; set him, so to say, at defiance; told him, I believe, to do his best and his worst; and Mr. Howard gave him into custody."

"It is very strange."

"When I found what had happened—I had been out of town that day—I went at once to Charles. I told him that I could not believe him guilty, and I entreated him to tell me the circumstances of the case, which looked to me then, and look still, unaccountably mysterious ——"

"And he would not?" interrupted Mr. Cleveland, recalling how Charles had just met him.

"He would not tell me a word: told me he would not. I said I could even then set matters straight, and would get his release on the morrow, and nothing about it should ever transpire. He thanked me, but said he had nothing to tell; was, in fact, guilty. I could only think he must be guilty, and left him with that impression on my mind."

"It is altogether very strange," repeated Mr. Cleveland in a musing tone, as he sat stroking his face and thinking. "Will you state the particulars to me, as far as you are cognisant of them. I asked Charles to do so, but he would not."

"It occurred on Saturday morning," began Mr. Grubb. "When I reached the City, I found I had not got with me the cheque book of the firm, which I had taken away by mistake the previous evening, and I sent Charles home to look for it. He was a long while gone, but brought it when he came. During the period of his absence one of the cheques was abstracted, filled up for five hundred pounds, and ——"

"Filled up by whom?"

"The writing was an imitation of mine. Charles presented it at Glyn's, and got it cashed. All this he acknowledges to; but he refuses to say what he did with the money."

"Mr. Grubb," cried the agitated father, "appearances are against him—were never, I perceive, more strongly against anyone; but, before heaven, I believe him to be innocent."

Mr. Grubb made no reply.

"He has assured me of his innocence by the memory of his dead mother; and innocent I am sure he must be. He stated in the same breath that he should avow it to no one else, but submit to the penalty of the crime just as though he had committed it. As to what he did with the money—he could not have used it for himself. On that very Saturday afternoon he had to borrow money to bring him down to Netherleigh the next morning. John Cust lent it him."

"It is very singular," acknowledged Mr Grubb.

"Charles confessed as much to me at Netherleigh—that he had borrowed the money from Cust to get down with; three pounds, I think it was. I gave him a five-pound note, and a lecture with it. He promised to be more cautious for the future, and said that after Harry left he should not have occasion to spend much—which is true. But now, what I would like to know is this—if he drew that five hundred pounds, where is it? How came it that the next hour, so to say, he had none in his pocket?"

Mr. Grubb certainly could not answer.

"Has he been made the instrument of another?" returned Mr. Cleveland. "Was he imposed upon by anyone?—sent to cash a cheque that he himself thought was a genuine and proper cheque?"

"That is scarcely likely. Were it the case, what objection could he have to declare it? My opinion is—I am sorry to have to give it—that Charles had got into some desperate money trouble, and used desperate remedies to extricate himself."

"What more desperate trouble could he be in than this?"

"True. But he may have hoped we should be lenient. Even now," added Mr. Grubb, his voice trembling with the concern he felt, "we might be able to save him if he would but disclose the truth. Mr.

Howard absolutely refuses to quash the matter unless he does: and I think he is right."

"But Charles won't disclose it; he won't," bewailed the clergyman, taking the other's hand in token of his gratitude. "Look here, my dear friend," he added, after a pause of thought, "can Charles be holding his tongue to screen somebody?"

"To screen somebody? How?"

"That he did this thing willingly, with his eyes open, I never will believe. It is not in a Cleveland's nature to commit a crime. Moreover, I repeat to you that he has just assured me of his innocence by the memory of his dead mother. No, no; whatever may be the facts, Charles was not wilfully guilty. I could stake my life upon it. In cashing that cheque he must have been made the innocent tool of another, whom he won't betray out of some chivalrous feeling of honour."

"But no one had possession of the cheque book but Charles," reasoned Mr. Grubb. "He found it in the breakfast-room where I had left it. My servants are honest; they would not touch it. Moreover, it was Charles, himself, who presented the cheque for payment, and got the money."

Mr. Cleveland rubbed his gray hair back with a look of perplexity; hair that was getting scanty now. Look at the case in what way he would, it presented contradictions and difficulties that seemed to be insuperable.

"You are staying at Lord Acorn's, I suppose," remarked Mr. Grubb, when he rose to leave.

"Until Saturday. I can't run away from London and leave my boy in Newgate. Heaven be with you! I know you'll do for him what you can."

The whole of the after-part of this day certain words spoken by the unhappy father haunted Francis Grubb. *In cashing that cheque he must have been made the innocent tool of another, whom he won't betray out of some chivalrous feeling of honour.* An idea had been presented to him which he might never have taken up of himself; a painful idea; and, do what he would, he could not drive it away. It intruded itself into his business; it followed him home to dinner; and it worried him while he ate it. He had not found Lady Adela at home. She was dining out somewhere. Certainly Mr. Grubb's domestic life was not a very sociable one. After dinner he went to his club.

It was eleven o'clock before he got home; later than he had meant to be, but he did not expect his wife to be there yet. The butler, a trustworthy, semi-confidential servant, who had entered the service of the uncle, Francis Grubb, when his present master was a boy, and who had become greatly attached to him, came to the drawing-room to see if anything was wanted.

"Is Lady Adela in?" asked his master.

"No, sir. Her ladyship came in not long ago for a minute or two, and went out again."

"Stay a minute, Hilson," cried Mr. Grubb, as the man was turning away. "Shut the door. Carry your memory back to last Saturday. Did you chance to see Mr. Charles Cleveland come in that morning?"

"Yes, sir: I was at the front door, talking to one of Lady Acorn's servants, who had brought a parcel for Lady Adela. Mr. Cleveland jumped out of the cab he was in, and ran past me all in a hurry, saying he had come to look for something the master had left behind him."

"Did he go at once to the room where I breakfasted?"

"No, sir. My lady chanced to be descending the stairs at the moment; Mr. Cleveland went towards her, asking where Mr. Grubb had breakfasted. In a minute or two, it could not have been much more, he came running out again, leaped into the cab, and went away in it at a great rate. That was the first time, sir."

Mr. Grubb lifted his eyes. "The first time! What do you mean?"

"Mr. Charles Cleveland came back again, sir. Not directly; half an hour or three-quarters later it may have been, perhaps more, I had not taken particular note of the time. I was in the hall then, watching John clean the lamp—he has done it slovenly of late. The front door was rung and knocked at as if it was going to be knocked down. I opened it, and Mr. Charles Cleveland rushed past me up to the drawing-room: I never hardly saw anybody in a greater hurry than he seemed to be. He came down again directly, my lady with him, and they went into the breakfast-room. He then ran out to the cab, and drove away at a fiercer rate than before."

"Was it the same cab?"

"Oh yes, sir. Taking both times together he was not in the house three minutes."

"Not long enough to ——" Mr. Grubb checked himself, and remained silent.

"Not long enough to have drawn a false cheque, sir, when the handwriting has to be studied—as we have been saying below," put in the butler, following too closely his master's thoughts.

Mr. Grubb felt disagreeably startled. "Hilson! what are you saying? *Who* has talked of this below?"

"Only Davvy, sir. She got to know of it this morning through ——well, sir, I believe through a letter that my lady gave her to read."

"But how was that?" questioned Mr. Grubb, in a displeased tone.

"It was through a mistake of my lady's, sir," replied Hilson, dropping his voice. "She had meant to give Davvy a note from Madame Damereau, about the trimming of a dress; instead of that, she gave her one from Lady Grace. Davvy has been uneasy ever since, and she spoke in confidence to me."

"Why uneasy?"

"Well, sir, Davvy thinks it an unpleasant thing to have happened, especially for us upper servants. The cheque must have been torn out and filled in by somebody."

"Nonsense," interposed Mr. Grubb. "Take care you do not speak of this, Hilson; and caution Davvy."

"No fear of me, sir; you know that. I told Davvy she must have misunderstood Lady Grace's note, and that she must hold her tongue; and I am sure she will. She was very sorry to have read it. She asked my lady's instructions as to the dress, and my lady tossed the note to her, saying she would find them there. Davvy read on to the very end, expecting to come to them. That's how it was, sir."

Mr. Grubb remained on alone, deep in painful thought, his head bent on his hand. His vague suspicions were strengthening, strengthening terribly.

And what of Lady Adela? This could not have been a good time for her—as the children say. Made aware that morning by Grace's letter that Charles was taken into custody, she was seized with terror: and perhaps it was not so much carelessness as utter bewilderment that caused the stupid error of handing the wrong letter to Davvy. Adela saw her father in the course of the day. Too anxious to remain passive, she went out to hear what she could at Lord Acorn's, putting to him a cautious word of inquiry. Lord Acorn made light of the whole business—he did not yet know the particulars. Charley would soon be released, he carelessly said; Grubb would take care of that. As to a little fright, or a short incarceration, it would do Master Charley good—he had been going the pace of late. And this opinion of her father's so completely reassured Lady Adela, that her fears of consequences to Charley subsided; she returned home, took up her visiting, and was her own saucy self again.

She came in early to-night, before twelve o'clock, looking cross. Her husband rose from his chair, and smoothed his troubled face.

"Where have you been, Adela?"

"To Lady Sanely's:" and the tone of defiance audible in Lady Adela's answer arose from the consciousness that he had forbidden her to go there. The dissatisfied face she brought back with her, and the early hour of her return, seemed to say that she had not met with much pleasure there this evening. Perhaps she had staked, and lost, all the money she had taken; or, perhaps, play was not going on that night.

She threw herself into a chair, eating a biscuit she had caught up from a plate on the table, and let her mantle fall from her shoulders. How very pretty she looked! Her dress was white lace, trimmed about with small blush roses; her cheeks wore a lovely flush; a pearl necklace, of priceless value, lay on her fair neck, bracelets to match encircled her slender arms: one of the many magnificent gifts of her fond husband.

"Don't shut the door," cried Adela, tartly, for he had crossed the room to do it. "I'm sure it's hot enough."

"Ah, but I want to say a few words to you," he replied, as he closed it. And the Lady Adela, divining by a subtle instinct which penetrates to us all at odd moments, one cannot tell how or wherefore, that the subject of his "few words" was to be Charley's trouble, and not her transgression as to Lady Sanely's, armed herself for reprisal. Adela never felt sure afterwards that she had not been wicked enough to put up a hasty prayer for aid. Aid to be firm in disguising the truth: aid to blind him as to her share in the past Saturday's exploit and to strengthen the accusation against Charley. Rising from her seat, she crossed to the nearest window and threw it open, as if needing a breath of the soft midnight air.

"This is a sad business about Charles Cleveland, Adela. I find you know of it."

"Yes," she answered, fanning away a moth that was floating in, attracted by the light. "I hope you are satisfied with your work. You had a paltry spite against him, and you have cast him into Newgate to gratify it."

"Adela, you know better."

"It is enough to ruin his prospects for life. It would ruin some people's—they who are without influential connections. Of course Charley will soon be on his legs again, and laugh at his paltry enemies."

Mr. Grubb put his hand, almost caressingly, on his wife's arm, and caused her to turn her face to him. "Will you tell me what you know of this, my dear?"

"Tell you what I know of it!—How should I know anything of it?" she retorted, flirting her costly fan. "Poor Charley may have meant to borrow the money for a day or two—I don't accuse him; I only say it may have been so—and then to have replaced it: but you and that old kangaroo of a partner of yours have prevented him doing it. To gratify your own revenge you seized upon him before he had time to act, and threw him into that place of crime where men are hung from —Newgate. You did it to bring disgrace upon my family, through my sister Mary."

He did not reply to this: he was accustomed to her unjust accusations.

"Adela," he said, dropping his voice to a whisper, "were you wholly ignorant of this business? *Who drew the cheque?*"

She turned round with a start, defiance in her eyes.

"Adela, my wife," he whispered, gently laying both hands upon her shoulders in his earnestness, "if you had anything to do with this business, if Charles Cleveland was not the guilty party, acknowledge it now. Confide in me for once. I will avert consequences from him and suspicion from you. The secret shall be buried in my breast, and I will never revert to it."

Oh, what possessed her that she did not respond to this loving

appeal in time? Was it pure fright that prevented her? Shame?—Shame to have to confess to her guilt? Any way, she steeled her heart against it. Her lovely features had grown white, and her eyes fell before his. Presently she raised them, flashing with indignation, her tone, her words, as haughty as you please.

"Mr. Grubb, how dare you offer me this insult?"

"Do not meet me in this way, Adela. I am asking you a solemn question; remember that there is One above Who will hear and register your answer. Were you the principal in this transaction, and was Cleveland but your agent? Do not fear to trust me—*your husband:* you shall have my free forgiveness now, beforehand, my shelter, my protection. Only tell me the truth, as you wish it to be well with us both in after life."

Again she cowered before his gaze, and again recovered herself. Could it be that her better angel was prompting her to the truthful path?

"What can possibly have induced you to put such a question to me?"

"It is an idea that has forced itself upon my mind. Without some such explanation the affair is to me an utter mystery. If Charles Cleveland ——"

"And don't you think you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" she interrupted. "I rob a bank! I steal a cheque! Has it come to this—that you suspect *me?*"

"Forgive me, Adela, if I am wrong. Be it how it may, you should meet me differently. Oh, my wife, let there be perfect confidence between us at this moment, on this subject. Tell me the truth, as before Heaven!"

"Am I in the habit of telling you untruths? I thought the truths I tell you were generally a little too plain to be pleasant," she added in her bravado. "None but a mean-spirited man could so suspect his wife."

"This is all you have to say to me, Adela—your definite answer?"

"Definite enough," she retorted, with a nervous sob, between a laugh and a cry; for, what with fear and discomfort, she was becoming slightly hysterical.

"I am bound to believe you, Adela," he said, the tears in her eyes disarming his latent doubts. "I do believe you. But ——"

"And now that you have had your say, listen to me," she interrupted, choking down all better feeling and speaking with contemptuous anger. "Never speak on the subject to me again if you would keep up the semblance of peace between us. My spirit has been dangerously aroused against you, Mr. Grubb; not only now, for this injustice to me, but for your barbarous treatment of poor Charles Cleveland."

Once more, he knew not why or wherefore, something like a doubt returned to Mr. Grubb's mind. He held her before him.

"It has been the truth, Adela?—as I hope, and pray, and trust! I ask it once again—that it may be well with us in after life."

"Would I trouble myself to tell a falsehood about it to *you?* Do you think I have no feeling—that I should bear such distrust? And if you would recompense me for this mauvais quart d'heure, you will release that poor fellow to-morrow—for his father's sake."

She flung her husband's arm away and quitted the room, leaving him to *his* feelings. Few can imagine them—torn, outraged, thrown back upon his generous heart. But she had certainly managed to dispel his doubts of herself. No guilty woman, as he believed, could have faced it out as she did.

"It must have been Cleveland's own act and deed, and no other person's," he mentally concluded. "What madness could have come over the lad?"

CHAPTER XXI.

TRACING THE NOTES.

One of the most able counsellors of the day, Mr. Serjeant Mowham, chanced to be intimately acquainted with the Rector of Netherleigh; and the unhappy father despatched him to Newgate, in a friendly, not in a legal capacity, to see what he could do with or for the prisoner.

He could not do much. The old saying, "Tell your whole case to your lawyer and your doctor," is essential advice, but Charles Cleveland would tell nothing, neither truth nor falsehood. In vain Serjeant Mowham protested, with tears in his eyes (a stock of which, so the Bar affirmed, he kept in readiness), that he was working in the dark, working for pure friendship's sake, and that without some clue or hint to go upon, no defence that had a chance of success could be made, even though his advocate before the judge told all the *un*-truths that ever advocate's tongue gave utterance to. The prisoner was immovable, and Serjeant Mowham in despair.

How matters really would have ended, and whether Mr. Howard would have allowed it to come to trial, cannot be said, had not fortune been kinder to Charles than he was to himself.

One morning, when the days before the prisoner's second examination were growing few, the Earl of Acorn had a slice of luck. He had backed a certain horse at a provincial race meeting, and the horse won. Amongst other moneys that changed hands was a fifty-pound note. An hour after the Earl received it he made his way into his drawing-room in haste, where sat his daughters, Grace and Mary Cleveland; the latter with her infant on her lap.

"Mary," cried the Earl, "what were the numbers of the notes paid over to Charles Cleveland at Glyn's? I partly remember them, but not quite."

"My husband has them," answered Lady Mary. "But the thing

has given me by far too much worry, papa, for me to retain the numbers in my head. I am not sure I ever heard them."

"I have them," interrupted Grace. "I copied them the other day. There was no knowing, I thought, but it might prove useful."

"Quite right, Gracie girl," said the Earl. "Let's see them. '3,0,2,5,5,'" continued Lord Acorn, reading one of the numbers which Lady Grace laid before him. "I thought so. One of these notes has just been paid to me, Mary, by young Waterware."

"Where did he get it?" eagerly inquired Grace.

"I did not ask him. It was only since I left him that I noticed the number. I'll get it out of him by-and-by."

"At once, at once, sir," urged Mary. "Oh, papa, do go to him. I feel *sure* Charles is not guilty."

"No impatience, Mary. Where the deuce am I to pick up Waterware at this time of day? I might as well look for a needle in a bottle of hay. To-night I shall know where to find him."

Chance, however, favoured the Earl. In strolling up St. James's Street, in the afternoon, he met Lord Waterware.

"I say, Waterware," he began, linking his arm in that of the younger peer, "where did you get that fifty-pound note you gave me this morning?"

"Where did I get it! Let's see. Oh, from Nile. He was owing me a hundred, and he paid me yesterday. That fifty, two twenties, and a ten. Why? It's not forged, I suppose," cried the young nobleman, with a yawn.

"Not exactly. Wish I had a handful of them. Good day. I'm going on to Nile's."

Colonel Nile, though addicted to play a little at cards for what he called amusement, and sometimes did it for tolerably high stakes, was a very different man from those other men mentioned in this history—Colonel Houghton and Mr. Piggott, who had led Robert Dalrymple to his ruin. They were professed gamblers, and had disappeared from good society long ago. Colonel Nile was a popular member of it, liked and respected.

Lord Acorn found him at home, walking about in a flowery dressing-gown. He was a middle-aged man, and a bachelor, and well off.

"The fifty-pound note I paid over to Waterware," repeated Colonel Nile, cautiously, somewhat surprised at the question, and wondering whether random young Waterware had got into any scrape. "Why do you want to know where I got it?"

"Because it is one of the notes that Charley Cleveland is in trouble for; the first of them that has been traced. You must give me the information, Nile, or I shall apply for it publicly."

"Oh, I have no objection in the world," cried the Colonel, determined to afford all that was in his power, and so wash *his* hands of any unpleasantness that might turn up. "I received it at Lady Sanely's loo-table, from—egad! from your own daughter, Lady Adela."

"From Lady Adela!" echoed the surprised listener.

"From Lady Adela, and nobody else," repeated Colonel Nile. "She paid another fifty to the old Dowager Beck the same evening."

Lord Acorn stared. "But surely they don't play as high as that there!"

"Don't they, though! and higher, too. To tell you the truth, Acorn, it's getting a little too high for prudent people. I, for one, mean to draw in. Old Mother Sanely lives but for cards, and she'd stake her head if it were loose. She has the deuce's own luck, though."

With a mental word, sharp and short, given to his daughter Adela for allowing herself to be mixed up in company and amusement such as this, Lord Acorn brought his attention back to the present moment. "Adela gave another fifty-pound note to Lady Beck, you say, the same evening! Do you happen to know its number?"

"Not I," retorted the Colonel, who was not altogether pleased at the questions. "I don't make it my business to pry into notes that do not concern me."

"How long is it ago?"

"I hardly know. Nearly a week, I suppose. It is four or five days since I was first confined to the house with this incipient gout. I think it was the night before that—Saturday night."

Lord Acorn proceeded straight to Lady Beck's; and, with much trouble and persuasion, she was induced to exhibit the note spoken of by Colonel Nile, which was still in her possession, for, like the Colonel, she had been ill for some days, so had had no opportunity of playing it away. The old dowager was verging on her dotage, and could not, at first, be convinced that the Earl was not going to take law proceedings against her for winning money of his daughter. He soothed her, copied the number by stealth, went home, and compared it with Lady Grace's pocket-book. *It was another of the notes!*

"What do you think of it, Grace?" cried the Earl, in perplexity. "Can Cleveland have been owing money to Adela."

"I should imagine not," replied Lady Grace.

"To think she should be such a little fool as to frequent a place where they play like that!"

"But, papa, you knew of it."

"I did not know old Sanely went in for those ruinous stakes. Five pounds, or so, in a night to risk—I thought no worse than that."

Grace understood now. She had deemed her father indifferent. He was then looking at it from one point of view; she from another.

"It wears a singular appearance," mused the Earl. "To tell you the truth, Grace, I don't like the fact of these notes being traced to Adela. It looks—after the rumour of the absurd flirtation they carried on—almost as if she and Cleveland had gone snacks in the spoil. What now, Gracie? Are you going to fly?"

For Lady Grace Chenevix had bounded from her chair in sudden

agitation, her arms lifted as if to ward off some dread fear. "Sir! father! the thing has become clear to me. That I should not have suspected it before!——knowing what I did know."

"Child," he cried, gazing at her in amazement, "what is the matter with you?"

"Adela did this. I see it all. She drew the cheque. Charles Cleveland was only her instrument; and, in his infatuated attachment, he has taken the guilt on himself, to shield her. Well may he have asserted his innocence to his father! Well may his conduct have appeared to us all so incomprehensible!"

"Why, Grace, you are mad!" gasped the Earl. "Accuse your sister of—of—forgery! Do you reflect on the meaning of your words?"

"Father, do not look so sternly at me. I feel sure I am right. I assure you it is as if scales had fallen from my eyes, for I see it perfectly clearly. Adela wanted money for play: she had been drawn in, far deeper than anyone suspected, sir, at Lady Sanely's gaming-table. It was Mr. Grubb's intention to refuse her further funds: no doubt he did refuse them: and ——"

"How do you know it was his intention?"

"Oh, papa, I do know it; never mind how now. I say that Mr. Grubb must have refused her; and she, when this cheque book fell into her hands ——"

"Don't continue, Grace," sharply interposed Lord Acorn; "you make my blood run cold. You must prove what you assert, or retract it. If—it—*is* proved"—the Earl drew a long breath—"Cleveland must be extricated. What a thundering fool the fellow must be!"

"Let me have time to think," said Grace, putting her hand to her head. "Extricated of course he must be, for I know it is true, but—if possible—without exposing Adela."

With the last words, Grace sank back in her chair and burst into a storm of sobs. Lord Acorn was little less moved. They spoke together further, and agreed not to tell Mary Cleveland, in spite of her state of impatience, that Lord Acorn had traced the numbers of the two notes.

Lady Grace decided to confide all to Mr. Grubb. It could not be kept from him long; and she wanted to bespeak his clemency for Adela. So in the evening she proceeded to his house, tolerably sure that her sister would be out somewhere or other. But she found Mr. Grubb also out: at his club, Hilson thought. Grace dismissed her carriage, went up to the drawing-room, and wrote a word to Mr. Grubb, asking him to come home. The thought crossed her, that perhaps it was not quite the thing to do, but Lady Grace Chenevix was not the one to stand upon formal ceremony.

He returned at once, full of bustle and looking rather anxious. "Anything the matter, Grace? Anything amiss with Adela? She's not ill?'

"She is at the Opera, I fancy; very well, no doubt." And then she sat down and imparted her suspicions—just an allusion to them —that her poor sister was the culprit.

"Grace," he whispered, "I don't mind telling you that the same fear haunted me, and I spoke to her. She indignantly denied it."

"Two of the notes have been traced," murmured Grace.

"Traced!"

"Paid away by Adela, at Lady Sanely's."

There was a dead silence. Lady Grace Chenevix did not raise her eyelids, for she felt keenly the pain of avowal. An ominous shade of despair overspread his face.

"Grace, Grace," he broke forth in anguish, "what is it you are saying?"

"One of them, for fifty pounds, came into my father's hands to-day, and he has traced it back to Adela," continued Grace, striving to keep down the signs of her pain. "Another of them she paid the same evening to the Dowager Beck. Papa knows of this; he found it out to-day. What inference can we draw but that Adela —— You know what I would say."

"Could she descend to this?" he groaned. "To be a party with Charles Cleveland ——"

"Charles was no party to it," interrupted Grace warmly; "he must have been her instrument, nothing more. Rely upon that. Whatever may be his follies, he is the soul of honour. And it must be from some chivalrous sense of honour, of noblesse oblige, you understand, that he is continuing to shield her now the matter has come out. What is to be done? Charles Cleveland must not be tried as a felon."

"Heaven forbid!—if he be indeed innocent. But, Grace," thoughtfully added Mr. Grubb, "I cannot but think you are mistaken. Were Adela guilty she would have acknowledged it to me, when I told her, in all tenderness, that I would forgive, shield, and protect her."

Lady Grace answered by a despairing gesture. "She would not confess to you for very shame, I fear. Dear Mr. Grubb, *what* is to be done? We have to save Adela's good name as well as his. You must see Charles, and get the truth from him."

"I would rather get it from Adela."

"If you can. I doubt it. Having denied it once, she will never confess now."

Lady Grace had reason. Mr. Grubb spoke to his wife the following morning. He said that two of the notes had been traced to her possession; and that, for her own sake, she had better explain, while grace was yet held out to her. But he spoke very coolly, without the smallest sign of endearment or tenderness; nay, there was a suspicion of contempt in his tone, and that put Adela's spirit up.

What answered she? Was she quite blind, quite foolish?

She persisted in her denial, called him by a scornful name, haughtily ordered him to be silent, and finally marched out of his presence, declaring she would not re-enter it until he could finally drop all allusion to the subject.

With a half curse on his lips—he, so temperate and sweet-tempered a man!—Mr. Grubb went straight to Newgate, and obtained an interview with the prisoner. It came to nothing satisfactory; Charles was harder in his obstinacy than ever. From thence Mr. Grubb drove back to the West End, to Chenevix House. Some morning visitors were there, and Lady Mary Cleveland was exhibiting her baby to them. Mr. Grubb admired with the rest, and then made a sign to Grace. She followed him into the next room.

"I don't see what is to be done," he began. "Adela will not hear a word, will not admit anything, and I can make nothing of Charles Cleveland. Upon my mentioning Adela—of course, only in hints; I could not accuse my wife outright to him—he interrupted me with a request that I would not introduce Lady Adela's name into so painful a matter; that he had brought the disgrace upon himself, and was prepared to pay for it. I think he may have lent the two notes to Adela. It would be but one hundred pounds out of the five. I cannot believe, if my wife were guilty, that Cleveland would take the penalty upon himself. Transportation for life, or whatever the sentence incurred may be, is no light matter, Grace."

Grace shuddered. "Do not let him incur the risk of it."

"I would rather cut off my right hand than punish a man unjustly, were he my greatest enemy. But unless I can get at the truth of this matter, and find proof that your view of it is correct, I shall have no plea, to my partner, to Glyns, or to my own conscience, for hushing it up; and the law must take its course."

"Alas! alas!" murmured Lady Grace.

"You seem to overlook my feelings in this affair, Grace," he whispered, a deep hue dyeing his cheeks. "That she may have had something to do with it her paying away the notes proves: and to find the wife of your bosom thus in league with another —— You don't know what it is, Grace."

"I can imagine it," she answered, the tears standing in her eyes as she rose to answer his adieu. "Believe me, you have, and always have had, my deepest and truest sympathy; but Adela is my sister; what more can I say?"

Grace sat on, alone. The murmur of voices came to her from the adjacent room, but she heeded it not. She leaned her head upon her hand, and debated with herself. It was imperative that the real facts of the case should be brought to light; for if Charles Cleveland were permitted to stand his trial, perhaps to suffer the penalty of transportation, and it came out, later, that he was innocent, and her sister the guilty party, what a fearful position would be that of Adela!

Could Charley not be brought to confess through stratagem,

mentally debated Grace. Suppose he were led to believe that Adela, to save him, had declared the truth, *then* he might speak. It was surely a good idea. Grace weighed it, in all its bearings, and thought the end would justify the means. But to whom entrust so delicate a mission? Not to Mr. Cleveland, he would betray it all to Charles at the first sentence; not to Mr. Grubb, his high sense of honour would never let him intimate that Adela had confessed what she had not; not to Lady Mary, for her only idea of Newgate was that it was a place overflowing with infectious fevers, which she should inevitably bring home to baby. Lord Acorn? Somehow Grace could not ask him. Who next? Who else was there? *Herself?* Yes, and Grace felt that none were more fitted for the task than she was—she who had the subject so much at heart. And she resolved to go.

But she could not go alone to Newgate. Her mother ought to be with her. Now the matter, relative to the tracing of the notes to Adela, had been kept from Lady Acorn. Grace disclosed it to her in the emergency, and made her the confidante of what she meant to do.

Lady Acorn sat aghast. For once in her life she was terrified to silence and meekness. Grace obtained her consent, and the time for the expedition was fixed. Not that Lady Acorn relished it.

"If it be as you and your father believe, Grace, Master Charley Cleveland deserves the soundest shaking man ever had yet," cried she, when speech returned to her.

"Ah, mamma! Then what must Adela deserve?"

"To be in Newgate herself," tartly responded Lady Acorn.

(To be continued.)

THE SAPPHIRE CROSS.

By Joyce Darrell.

CHAPTER I.

LUCIA'S NEIGHBOURS.

THE sunset hour had chimed from the church towers all around, and several of Lucia's neighbours were met to gossip in the street. The atmosphere was stifling, the season being summer in Italy. The lurid reflection of the sunken sun cast a sombre glare athwart the dust raised by every step of beast or man along the parched road. At the corner of the street the water-melon vendor had already set up his stall. With a sharp, curved knife he had divided the huge green balls into halves, and laid bare the crimson heart thickly studded with jetty pips.

And this again he was now deftly cutting into wedge-like slices, while a group of ragged children had stopped their screeches and their summersaults to look at him.

It was too hot to move unless inevitably, too hot to think, too hot to talk even, unless the subject were a very thrilling one, such as money, or the shortcomings of one's acquaintances.

The walkers lounged along with the mournful expression of utter ennui. From jalousied windows leaned men in shirt-sleeves smoking, and women in dressing-jackets languidly fanning themselves. Once in a way lumbered along a creaking water-cart, which with a perfunctory sprinkling made little furrows in the dust.

Opposite the water-melon stall three porters were playing "mora," with a brisk interchange of vituperative epithets and much sacrilegious swearing. Near them a lad was stretched asleep. In the middle of the road lolled a panting dog with its tongue out. Over the sky was a pearly haze. Above the horn of the crescent moon one star glimmered faintly as yet, but grew every moment in splendour and size, as though drawing to itself the dying glory of the western sky. Such was the scene.

And the neighbours? Needless to say that they were of the class which can afford to despise appearances, or they would not have been sitting in the street. There was a brown, thin, brisk little thing called Beppina, who worked as a milliner. The tall, sallow young woman next to her, with an elaborate but untidy coiffure and an unkempt finery of costume, was the daughter of Momo, who kept the café on the piazza. She was arranging the tangled knitting of a blind woman, who was Angela—Lucia's aunt. Hard by, on a door-step, sat a man holding a little child in his arms. His general air, his gaunt cheeks

and hollow eyes betrayed him for a poor workman—a son of toil whose heritage was rich in hardships and scanty in rewards. The pale little daughter—fondly held—leaned her curly head confidingly against his shoulder, while her eyes, full of the dumb reverie of childhood, solemnly followed the circling flight of the bats.

"These foreigners are capable of making his fortune," said Angela, enviously, and gave a vicious twist to her needles. "I said to Lucia, 'My poor child! you manage badly. You are too soft. I have always said so. Why have they not done something for you by this time?'"

"Diamine! That would have been the Count's business, not the Countess's," croaked the workman, and the two girls laughed.

"Pezzo d'ignorante!" exclaimed Angela in a fury. "I will thank you to put your glib tongue to some better use than that of hinting slander against my Lucia."

"I meant no harm," said Tito, rather resentfully. "Everybody knows that Lucia is like a saint in a niche. And good with that—how good! Did she not nurse my Isolina for a whole month last winter?" he concluded fondly, as the child, hearing her name, looked up into his face.

"Oh, she is good enough—too good," said Angela, mollified at last. "She can help everybody but herself."

Beppina, recovering from a yawn, here gave the conversation a new turn. "She must be very rich, this Polish countess," said the milliner. "My brother dressed her hair for a masquerade last winter, and he says she has jewels like a queen's."

"They say that she saw Signor Guido at the theatre one night, and was so struck with him that she wrote to him to call upon her the very next morning," related Gigia, the daughter of Momo.

"Think of that!" exclaimed Beppina, profoundly impressed.

"They are shameless, these fine ladies," declared Tito.

"You are a set of prating idiots," coolly remarked Angela. "As for you, Gigia, your tongue wags a great deal too fast. It was my Lucia who introduced Guido to the Countess."

"We all know that Lucia interests herself in the Signor Guido," replied Gigia, but in discreet undertone, and was rewarded by a sympathetic giggle from Beppina.

"The Countess took a fancy to learn the gold embroidery that Lucia does so well, and she had a lesson every morning. You know what Lucia is—so quiet and refined, tanto per bene. The Countess talked to her as she might have talked to her own sister, and told her how she wanted her portrait done. And she said that she wished to find some clever young painter, who was poor. For the Countess is charitable, and she was not born yesterday either. And she knows better than to employ one of your grand artists, who think the world can't do without them, and yet paint no better than anybody else."

"Then how much will she give Guido?" inquired the milliner.

"I don't know," said Angela curtly, and Beppina understood that her curiosity was not to be gratified.

"I daresay Lucia knows," she remarked by way of revenge, with an air of placid spite.

"Yes," said Gigia, catching the infection of courage, "doubtless Lucia knows most of Signor Guido's secrets."

"Lucia knows no secrets, except such as are town-talk," replied Angela swiftly, and with much significance.

Gigia, whose reputation unfortunately was not unblemished, bit her lip, while Tito, malicious like all of his country, sniggered provokingly.

"Are they not soon going—the Count and Countess?" inquired Beppina.

"Very soon. Lucia says they are only waiting until the Count has finished copying a picture in one of the churches."

"Copying a picture! Why does he not make Guido copy it for him?" asked the milliner, scandalised at a rich person doing anything which he could get done for him.

"Mah!" Angela shrugged her shoulders expressively. "It would be more natural of course. But—one knows—foreigners are so odd! The Countess, poveretta! complains all day long of the heat—the heat."

"It is well for her to have no more than that to complain of," sneered Tito.

"You may well say so! Here are we that toil and sweat from dawn to sundown, and what to gain?"

"Bread just enough to starve upon by inches, a bed in the hospital when we sicken, and a grave with four or five other poor wretches when we die," replied Tito.

"And I to be blind besides!" continued Angela. "There's this operation to be performed on my eyes in October. The doctors of the hospital tell me it will succeed, but I have no opinion of doctors. They are mostly knaves when they are not fools."

"But they are generally knaves," said Tito, who liked strong conclusions.

"I am a poor unfortunate creature," declared Angela, with much fervour of self-pity. "There was a bare-footed friar in my paése in the mountains who made wonderful cures."

"Oh, priests!" exclaimed Tito, disdainfully.

"Eccola! Lucia," said Beppina.

Lucia advanced towards them slowly and a little wearily. In the soft, faint light diffused by myriads of stars in the now cloudless sky she was only indistinctly visible. A slight girl, dressed in some dark stuff too heavy for the season, with a 'kerchief knotted round her slender throat. The head, with its mass of simple plaits, was graceful; the oval of the face was pure; so much could be seen. Had it been brighter, Lucia would have appeared as a girl too grave, too

pale, too thin for striking beauty, but of strangely refined air: with a mouth whose tender plaintiveness was contradicted by the steady, thoughtful look of the dark eyes. And so seeing her, you would have known her for a woman very womanly, more courageous than sanguine, inured to suffering, loving, steadfast, and strong.

"Well! has she paid you?" questioned Angela, in a fretful sotto voce, as her niece paused beside her chair.

"Yes," answered Lucia, and her aunt breathed an exclamation of relief.

"It is late," said the girl. "Isoletta here is fast asleep."

"Late! I should think so," said Angela. "I thought you would never come home."

"I had to go to the shop after the Countess had had her lesson, as the Signora Elisa had left word that she wanted to speak to me. She complains that my last piece of embroidery was not so well done as usual."

"Lies!" observed Angela, decisively. "All an excuse for beating you down. These fine lady shopkeepers, *I* know them. Well, well! Run; buy some bread, child, and let us go upstairs and eat it. Always bread—nothing but bread—eh, Tito?"

"We eat it with the salt of habit," answered Tito with sententiousness. He was a lover of aphorisms, and troubled himself little about their sense so long as he thought that they sounded striking. A poor journeyman carpenter, and often out of work (for times were bad, and he was too weakly to be skilful), he was not likely to take a very sanguine view of life. His wife had died early of consumption, aggravated by want; and as to Isoletta it might be said that, more than by scanty food and miserable clothing, she had been kept alive by some occult force in her father's passionate love. She was Tito's great consolation, but he had another. Of an evening, when Isoletta's busy feet were still and her solemn eyes were closed on the hardships of the world, Tito, leaving the door ajar for some kind neighbour to hear her if she cried, would go to a meeting of his Società. This was a revolutionary brotherhood to which he belonged, and where he was comforted by hearing "humanity" exalted and "society" abused. In the minds of the meeting "humanity" meant the numerous and interesting class which, lacking brains and energy, is naturally resentful of success. "Society," on the other hand, signified the whole class of brutal egotists who work for their daily bread. Poor Tito, however, did not understand any of these distinctions; only it somehow warmed his heart to listen to denunciations of the rich. When very much excited he would make a speech himself, rolling out inflated periods which enchanted him with the facility of their flow, and involving whatever small meaning he had in a coruscant cloud of phrases.

Lucia had returned with the bread, and the little group of gossips had risen to disperse.

"Surely you will come to the festa," Beppina was saying. "Gigia is already gone to dress herself, and you see I am ready. Momo is going with us, and Checco and the Marietta."

"Festa? Fiddlesticks! I shall not go," said Angela contemptuously, yet lingered.

"It will be the best festa the town has had this summer," urged the milliner. "Look round that corner and you will see the lights of the illumination already twinkling."

"What are illuminations and such fiddle-faddles to me, girl? Am I not blind?" replied Angela.

"There is Lucia," murmured Beppina, disconcerted by the reproach.

"Lucia—heaven be praised!—cares nothing for such things."

"I am rather tired," said Lucia, gently. "And besides that we have not supped."

"As to that, our supper is a small matter," remarked her aunt.

"Then, do you wish to go?" questioned Lucia. "There will be a great crowd, and not much that is new to see—even for us," she added tenderly and hesitatingly.

"Not much to see!" echoed Beppina. "Lucia, how you talk! There will be the tombola, and the decorations of the bakers' shops, which are a wonder, and the flags, and the coloured lanterns, and a torchlight procession to finish up with."

"And how can all this amuse her?" asked Lucia in a low voice, indicating her aunt by a gesture.

"Oh, don't make *me* the excuse," exclaimed Angela, in a martyred manner: "go, bambina, go if it amuses you. I can be left alone. What matter about *me?*"

"No, no! you must come also," said everybody in chorus, including Isoletta, whom the magic word festa had recovered from dreamland.

"I will give you my arm," said Tito. This well-meant offer was nearly fatal to all decision, for Angela thought she was being patronised, and resented the liberty as became a woman of spirit. Then Tito was huffed in his turn and had to be conciliated, not without trouble. At length, however, everybody's ruffled feathers were smoothed, and a little later Angela set off in high spirits, leaning on the arm of Momo, in whose favour Tito had retired, and followed by Lucia, Tito himself with Isoletta and the others.

Generally each quarter of an Italian town has its separate patron saint; and when the inhabitants of any particular quarter have a mind to amuse themselves, they celebrate the anniversary of their protector with a festa.

So had it happened on the evening when our story opens, and the saint to be honoured was no less popular a member of the hierarchy than the patron of the guild of bakers—the martyred Lorenzo. While the other parts of the town were gloomy, silent, and deserted

—given up to the flicker of the rare lamps, the rumble of an occasional carriage, and the solemn glory of the stars—in the quarter of San Lorenzo all was life and light and gaiety. Across the narrow streets, from house to house, stretched lines of coloured lamps, with festoons of flowers and flags. From the windows hung carpets and bright squares of cloth: on almost every window-sill were set two lights—a simple, old-fashioned Italian way of illuminating which is curiously effective. Below, streams of people were setting towards the great piazza of the church, which was naturally the culminating point of splendour. There floated upwards through the still night air the sound of footsteps, of voices and laughter, all blended into one, and forming that indescribable hum of a fête which has something so pleasant and something that is so sad.

Round the bakers' shops the crowd was dense, for the richer brethren of the guild had vied with one another in fantastic decorations. Out of dough they had moulded pillars, arches, and spiral columns, recklessly decorated with garlands and hanging baskets formed of vermicelli and ribbon macaroni. Tiny flags and artificial flowers made bits of colour here and there, and brilliant lighting completed the effect. One impassioned republican patriot drew the cream of the applause and the majority of spectators to himself, thanks to the striking and original device of two bound and weeping figures (in dough), representing the enslaved provinces of Istria and Trieste.

"See them! Those infamous Austrians shall not have them much longer to grind down and misgovern. I know what I say, and soon they shall feel the force of the Italian arm," said Tito, threateningly, between the gasps of his asthma, which the crowd had made worse.

"You had better take care first that they shall not feel the weight of Italian taxation," laughingly replied a freshly sonorous voice behind them.

"Oh, Guido!" cried Angela, and Lucia turned but said nothing.

A tall, dark young man, with an earnest face and a mass of bushy hair, had forced his way through the crowd to them. "I never thought to see you here," he said in low tones, with a grave, kind smile to Lucia, and drew her hand protectingly within his arm.

"You may well say that," exclaimed Angela. "I, too, never thought she would want to come. But what would you have? She is a girl like another, after all."

"You saw the Countess to-day," murmured the painter to Lucia as they moved forward. "Did she tell you that she has settled to begin the sittings to-morrow? And she fixed the price herself at five hundred francs, and insisted upon giving me the half of the sum down to-day. Ah! she is as good as she is beautiful."

"That is true," replied Lucia, but her voice trembled slightly.

"I feel as if my fortune were beginning at last, and I am glad that

it should be thanks to you, Lucia. You have been my tutelary saint," he added gratefully, though with a touch of serious playfulness.

She made no answer, rather shrank from him a little. Was it from shyness? Lucia was generally too simple and too sincere to be shy.

From the piazza as they reached it came the harsh cries of the street vendors, and the harsher strains of the band. Some score of stalls were set up in the vast space, and while each vendor tried to out-bellow his neighbour, the band did its brazen best to drown every other sound in the clash of the Garibaldian hymn.

The noise was deafening, the heat stifling, the crowd no doubt jubilant; for it had what it exults in—clamour.

Rows upon rows of tricoloured lights had completely transformed the venerable, weather-beaten façade of the church. Hence bunches of round white lamps, like enchanted fruit, and flimsy Chinese lanterns, cast a weird glimmer upon the frowning fronts and carved stone window-copings of the palaces, straightly shutting in two sides of the square. Here and there an open window with its two lights, its drapery, and the curtains billowed by the evening breeze, suggested that behind those gloomy walls there might yet be life and laughter. Many of the windows were tenanted, the spectators' heads making dim silhouettes against the comparative darkness within. Over all the glitter, all the din, all the memories of the past, all the efforts of the present, stretched the star-spangled canopy of the deep sky.

"That is the house of the Canon Bargilli. He has guests," said Beppina, pointing to a window near the church. Everybody looked up, and Lucia felt Guido's arm quiver.

"Behold her!" said the young man, in a tone of reverent ecstasy.

The Canon and his friends were clearly seen for a moment, as they leaned out of the window, attracted by some incident below. A row of lamps just above them cast a strong light upon their faces, and showed the rubicund, bland Canon in smiling discourse with a lady, whose golden hair was covered with a black lace veil, and on whose slender fingers gems flashed and sparkled, as she drew her host's attention to something in the crowd.

"It is the Countess," said Beppina. "The Sor Canonico thinks he must show her some politeness, I suppose, in return for all the money she has given him for his poor."

CHAPTER II.

THE SAPPHIRE CROSS.

Lucia was not exactly popular among her neighbours, although she was always willing to do a kind act, and was never heard to utter a harsh word of anybody. But instinctively the girls around her, Beppina, Gigia, and their fellows, inquisitive, gossippy, and a little

idle as they were, shrank from the superiority in her which they could not define.

"She is so proud," they said, whereas she was only reserved. For in character, education, and habits, Lucia was above her surroundings, and it was want of sympathy with these which rendered her silent and caused her to seem proud. Her father was a poor musician who fled to Paris after having been implicated in the political troubles of his country. There he earned a scanty livelihood by playing in orchestras and giving lessons, and there after a time he married a young Breton girl, who was a teacher of languages. She had all the industry, all the steadfast earnestness of her race, and Lucia—the only child of the marriage—had a nature curiously blended of her father's ardour and her mother's Celtic intensity. They destined her for a teacher and gave her a good education, which was, however, interrupted by her mother's untimely death.

Her father, already in broken health, seemed to lose all hope and courage when his wife died, and became possessed by a longing, which nothing could overcome, to look once more upon his beloved and now liberated land. He went back to Italy, and there, in a few months, died, leaving Lucia to the care of his only brother. This brother, who belonged to the order of seductive spendthrifts, had married Angela, a widow, and head of a flourishing embroidery establishment. He spent all his wife's savings; then reduced her to bankruptcy; speculated in the hope of retrieving his, or rather her, position, and, having completed her ruin very shortly after Lucia came to live under his roof, he put an end to his own life by blowing out his brains.

Poor Angela, left not only penniless, but burdened with debts, and with her young orphan niece upon her hands, made a brave struggle for some years. She taught Lucia embroidery, and with her help endeavoured to gather up the scattered threads of her old connection. But she was not very successful, and after a little space of frustrated hope and baffled endeavour, she was stricken with a fresh misfortune in her blindness.

Then the whole burden of their days fell upon Lucia, who toiled indeed early and late, and by dint of industry and self-sacrifice had so far managed to supply the bare necessaries of the little household. The two women—the elder with her sightless eyes and the troubled face of one who questions cruel fate unceasingly; the younger every month more thin, more pale, more sorrowfully resolute—hand in hand trod daily the stony round of want. They asked help from no one, for Lucia's proud sensitiveness repressed almost sternly the weak complainings that occasionally broke from her aunt. Angela liked to take credit to herself among her neighbours for her independence, and to blame them at the same time by implication for any meanness which she had detected; but in her secret soul she revolted almost peevishly at times against Lucia's lofty spirit.

The girl, as we have said, was little understood, and not heartily liked. But one there was who appreciated her struggles and her delicate reserve, and that was Guido, the painter. Perhaps his sympathy with her was quickened by the likeness in his own lot and his own nature to hers. For if she had only Angela, he was absolutely alone; if she was very, *very* poor, he had often barely bread to eat; and if she was independent-minded, his pride rose at times almost to a sombre ferocity. He had one passion—Art, and in the pursuit of that passion he was checked and foiled at every turn by his bitter poverty. In the single-mindedness of his purpose, in the inextinguishable fire of endeavour that burnt deep down in his soul, and in his haughty impatience of lower aims and meaner ambitions than his own, he had all the spirit of an ancient master. Austere and self-reliant, he had made for himself even fewer friends in the neighbourhood than Lucia. But he was young, and spite of art, spite of want, spite of pride, a chord of youthful poetry and tenderness vibrated in him.

From his miserable room under the roof, where a chair served him for an easel and a straw mattress for a bed, looking down across the little court to the first floor, he could see Lucia at her window. And when he had watched her for a few moments, with her graceful head bent over her work, or had seen her in the early morning give seed to her canary or water her plants, he felt consoled in part for the squalor and the din of the court, for the yelling children, the slatternly women, and all the other hideous sights and sounds which grated upon his artistic sense, and made life a constant torture to him. He was months in the house before he came to know her; for he felt a strange, fanciful shrinking at first from seeing her too close, liking to imagine things about her which he feared that a nearer knowledge might dispel. Half reluctantly he was attracted to her.

One day he helped her to draw up her bucket from the well in the court; then left her as she would have thanked him. Another time, meeting her overladen on the stairs, he took her burdens from her. Once he gave his arm to Angela, who was greatly flattered by the attention. Always eager for novelty and news, and more so than ever now in her blindness, she invited him to come to see her, with less of caution than she might under other circumstances have entered upon an acquaintance with a young man. The invitation had to be repeated two or times before he availed himself of it; but at last he came.

By degrees he fell into the habit of looking in for an hour or so of an evening, and often he made sketches of Lucia's hands, or of her pretty head. Very silent himself, he listened patiently to all Angela's babble, and sometimes, although rarely, he was led to talk a little about his own wishes and aims. He told them how, when a lad in the mountains of Calabria, his talent for drawing had attracted

the attention of a gentleman, who had brought the boy with him to his own town, and there entered him as a pupil at an art institute, promising him, if he worked, that he should be protected also in the future. Guido had studied with all the ardour of which he was capable, and that was infinite; but he had hardly concluded the three years' curriculum when his generous friend died. Then it was that poverty, hardship, and disappointment had begun for him, for, without interest or money, he had to struggle in the teeth of difficulties that would have quenched any ambition less fiery than his own.

"I should envy nobody on earth," he said once, in a burst of unusual confidence to Lucia, "if only I could earn now just so much money as would help me to pay a model for my picture." And it was this desire which Lucia had sought to gratify by introducing him to the Polish Countess, of whom we have heard so much already from Angela.

Needless to say that, to their neighbours, the artist's friendship with the blind woman and her niece was a fruitful source of gossip. Beppina and Gigia, who had been much attracted by the handsome, severe young painter on his first appearance among them, were not unnaturally disgusted at the indifference which he had displayed to their charms. And when it appeared that Lucia possessed the power which they lacked to soften such a savage, their interest in the supposed love affair gained piquancy from some slight mixture of true feminine spite.

But was it a love affair?

Natures like Lucia's, so self-sustained, like Guido's, so concentrated, are less subject than others to sudden onsets of passion. If they were in love they hardly realised the fact as yet. It is true, however, that at times Lucia's eyes had a soft, dreamy light that was new to them, and Guido also, to a close observer, would have seemed less sad than of old. But possibly he was at an age and in a frame of mind when love, to be rapid, must have some sharp flavour of a "glad surprise."

Lucia was not one of the women who attract suddenly; she unfolded the best of herself only by degrees. Of her it might truly be said that "the charm of her presence was felt when she went."

"Permesso?" said Guido's voice one evening, at the usual hour, and his picturesque head appeared inside Angela's door. "May I come in?"

"Come in—come in," answered Angela. "I am sure we are only too thankful to see anybody—let alone you, Guido."

"I always feel at home here," said the young man, as he took Lucia's slender hand. "What is it you do to your room, Signora Lucia, to make it so different from, and so much nicer than anybody else's?"

"You flatter," said Lucia, with a smile and a faint blush of pleasure; "what is there in the poor little room after all?" What

was there, truly? A sweet smell of mignonette from the box in the window; a little stir of happy dreaming from the pet canary in its cage; a bunch of white stocks before the statuette of the Madonna on the old worm-eaten chest; a few books. Very little, after all. But that all belonged to Lucia, and had something of her sweet, pure self.

"I have good news," said Guido, at the end of half an hour or so, when Angela had exhausted all the gossip of the street. "Pietro Siccoli, whom I knew at the Institute, has offered me the use of the half of his studio for the few weeks that the artist who generally shares it with him is away. It has a splendid light, and now that I have money to pay a model I shall get on with my picture, especially as Pietro will lend me stuffs. I have taken a room close to the studio, and I shall move there to-morrow."

"And that is what you call good news!" cried Angela. "You care nothing, then, for the friends you leave?"

Lucia bent her head closer over her work, and said simply, "I am glad for you, Signor Guido."

In answer to Angela, Guido broke out into protest. Could they think him so ungrateful? Did he not owe his present good luck to the Signora Lucia? He would never forget that. He would come to see them continually. But he must think of his art, and he could paint his picture so much better in the studio with Pietro.

"Yes, and fall into evil habits among a set of idle painters—worthless spendthrifts all of them," grumbled Angela, and added so much more to the same effect that the artist, smiling, rose at last to take his leave, fairly driven away by her scolding.

Holding the light, Lucia went with him to the landing outside the door. There she drew a little parcel from her pocket, and unfolding it displayed a small sapphire cross.

"Bella!" cried Guido. "Where did you get it?"

"The Contessa gave it me," replied Lucia.

"Ah!" Guido's voice had a tender inflection, and he took the jewel from Lucia's hands with an interest that did not escape her.

"She gave it you? Ah! She is good, is she not?"

"She wanted to give me money—more, I mean, than I had earned by the lessons—but I would not accept it," continued Lucia, in a hard, businesslike tone. "So she forced this cross upon me, with tears in her eyes. Our quarter's rent is due again to-morrow, and last winter, when the aunt was ill, I got into arrears with it, and now I must raise money on something. I had rather this went than anything more useful. Will you take it to the Monte di Pietà for me?"

"It seems a pity to part with it, too," said Guido, dreamily, twisting the cross about to catch the light upon its stones. "I have seen it on her neck."

"So have I," answered Lucia, curtly. "But you will take it, will you not? And please say nothing about it to my aunt. You know

what she is. She worries herself so much about all our troubles. I tell her as rarely as possible when the money runs short."

"Good," said Guido. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he asked, "Have you seen her lately?"

"The Countess? To-day. It was then she gave me the cross. I think she wanted to make up to me for having stopped the lessons."

"She has also stopped the sittings," replied Guido, in rather a discontented manner. "But she writes always to say she will resume them 'to-morrow, or next day.'"

"I think she is a little capricious," said Lucia.

"I think she is very unhappy," exclaimed the painter, warmly. "Her husband ——"

"What is all this gossiping about? If you want to talk, cannot you talk inside?" asked Angela, rather crossly, having groped her way to the door. Consequently Guido did not finish his sentence, but hastily saying "Good-night!" sprang up the stairs.

The next day, as Lucia was descending with a parcel of work, she met him, and he put fifty francs into her hand.

"So much?" said the girl. "And where is the pawn-ticket?"

"The ticket? Well—you see—unfortunately I lost it. But it does not matter, Signora Lucia. I remember the number, and the old Jew knows me, so I shall be able to get your cross back for you whenever you want it." And with suspicious promptitude Guido left her.

CHAPTER III.

THE COUNTESS.

Countess Wanda Cioronski had not been very long in the neighbourhood; but the few months that had elapsed since she came had sufficed for her to fascinate the popular imagination like a miraculous Madonna. Her beauty, her golden hair, her fantastic grace, her rich attire, her thousand whims and million caprices, were an enduring source of wonder and inexhaustible theme of gossip. Moreover, she had an impulsive and somewhat fickle, yet royal, benevolence. A tale of a sick child or a bedridden crone would reach her ears, and the next hour would see her in the squalid garret, laden with gifts. One or two such deeds as this had set all the beggars in motion. Countess Wanda was beset by the lame, the halt, and the blind, every time her lovely head appeared beneath the heavy portal of the old palazzo where she dwelt. Soon the applicants grew bolder, and her very staircase was stormed, till at last the Count had to interfere.

But although he regulated his wife's charities, he did not forbid them, and the Countess continued to scatter her money with a whimsical generosity which seemed to form the basis of her sparkling and inconstant nature. For the foam of the sea is not lighter,

the shadow on the hill-side not more shifting, the mirage not more delusive, than was this enchanting woman. She obeyed no law but her own caprice, and her caprice had no more conscient motive than the gossamer blown by the wind. Those who knew her best found her most unaccountable, and those who knew her least were spell-bound by her charm.

She was subject to fancies of the most violent and the least lasting kind. One of these fancies she had taken to Lucia; and when Lucia had recommended Guido to her, she had immediately jumped to the conclusion that the charming young embroideress and the struggling young painter were betrothed. How delightful it would be, she thought, to enable them to marry. She was as pleased with the notion as a babe with its new coral and bells, and received Guido on his first appearance with such irresistible grace that the ardent and amazed young man did not know if he were standing on his head or his heels. He thought he had never seen any woman so divinely lovely; and that was an opinion which many men had had before him. For the Countess was tall, graceful, and so exquisitely fair that (to borrow a metaphor from Dante) a pearl would hardly have been visible on her brow.

"You must scold me if I do not pose properly, monsieur," she said with winning frankness, in her pretty, broken Italian. "I assure you I am more anxious for you even than for myself, that this portrait should be a success."

And she sat beautifully, but managed all the same to talk a good deal, and questioned Guido so dexterously about himself, that she extracted more from him in that one hour than Lucia had done in a month.

On her side she was delighted with the young man's earnest modesty: so much so that, at the second sitting, she talked to him of herself. She became almost confidential; hinted that she was unhappy; spoke tenderly of her absent mother; and declared that the greatest sorrow of her life had been the untimely death of a beloved sister.

"Here is her portrait, monsieur. Dear Elise! She died so young—of consumption. Was she not lovely?" and the Countess raised her large blue-grey eyes, suffused with tears, to Guido's face.

The painter—soft-hearted like all his countrymen—took the miniature and looked at it in emotional silence. He would have liked to say that the living sister was infinitely more beautiful than the dead one: but he did not dare.

"We were always together," continued the Countess, dreamily and mournfully. "We made plans—pretty, girlish plans—for never separating. I nearly broke my heart when she died. And with her died all my happiness."

"Oh, do not say that!" exclaimed Guido, deeply touched. "You so young, so good, so ——" (the word "beautiful" died on

his lips). "Is not everyone who knows you too glad to make you happy?"

She looked at him with a tearful, pleased smile, as one looks at a child.

"Poor boy," she murmured. "You still believe in chivalry and devotion. But there! we will talk of something else. See, you shall do a large portrait from this miniature of my dear, lost Elise. It shall be a companion to mine. I should like it to be finished by the twentieth of this month, which was her birthday. Can you finish it by then?"

Guido naturally, in that moment of enthusiasm, would have promised to create a new world by the twentieth.

"Delightful!" said the Countess, her tears banished by smiles. "You will work at my portrait in the morning here, and at Elise's in your studio of an afternoon. It will be like a fresh link between her and me. Poor Elise! You have never had a sister, monsieur?"

"No," Guido answered. Except for an old great-uncle in Calabria, a priest, he was without kith or kin.

"Poor boy!" murmured the Countess once again. Guido did not like being pitied as a rule, but the flush which rose to his brow at her glance and tone was not one of wounded pride.

"You must let me help you," she continued. "At any rate, to do good is a lasting happiness. Hélas! it is the one ideal which does not turn, like fairy gifts, to ashes in one's hand. I will get you work among all my friends."

This sounded like patronage. Guido bent his head in acknowledgment a little haughtily. Possibly the Countess, with her quick tact, felt her mistake. "You will let me be kind to you, I hope," she said sweetly, and stretched out her little white hand, all sparkling with jewels.

Vanquished, speechless, Guido bowed reverently over the slender, fluttering fingers: then yielded to the most obvious of all temptations, and kissed them.

A croaking, evil laugh, which broke the stillness, made him start as if shot. A gentleman, unobserved, had entered the room, and stood watching the pretty scene.

"Toujours la même, ma chère," he said, in a tone of icy mockery, as he came forward. Guido did not understand the words, but it was not difficult for him to guess that the intruder was the Count. He bowed, then drew himself up and stood silent, unconsciously by his natural, simple dignity taking all the ridicule out of the situation. The Countess gave him a plaintive glance, but it was probably only her artistic sense which inspired it, for she did not seem particularly disconcerted.

"This is Signor Zondara, the young painter of whom I told you," she said to her husband.

"Ah!" said Count Cioronski, and bowed in his turn, very politely.

Guido, looking at him, felt a chill of repulsion. The Count, elegant, and, to a certain degree, even handsome as he was, had the air of a man on whom a blight has fallen. His pallid face recalled countless portraits which hang in galleries abroad—portraits of princely scions of some cruel, extenuated race, in which the strength of a founder has worn itself down to a fitful lust of gold or blood, and the seed of stormy energy yielded a harvest of disease.

"Mon ami," said the Countess, "monsieur could tell you where to go for a frame for your St. Sebastian."

"True," answered her husband, and, turning to Guido, entered with courtesy and ease into conversation with him, first about the frame, then about art in general. He was agreeable, affable, talked intelligently; yet Guido had all the time an irritating sense of being patronised, and as soon as it was possible he rose to go. His instinctive aversion to the Count grew to positive dislike as he reflected upon his appearance, his looks, his tones. With his excitable southern imagination he jumped to the conclusion that the lovely Countess was in the power of a kind of modern Bluebeard, and his blood boiled with indignation and generous pity. By the following morning he had convinced himself that she was habitually beaten, perhaps occasionally half starved; and it was with a thrill of almost painful excitement that he found himself again in her presence.

To his great astonishment she received him somewhat coldly, although graciously still. The truth was she was absorbed in meditation over a new toilette, her husband having at last announced that he would soon be ready to leave for Switzerland. But, of course, Guido could not know this, and his perplexity was great. Presently the Count appeared, dressed in a cool suit of gray, and evidently in the best of spirits. With his pale, steely smile, and sharp tones of gaiety, Guido found him no whit more genial than on the previous day. And yet he was amiability personified, and, as the amazed painter noticed, on the best of terms with his wife. He laughed and talked with her in rapid French and Polish, while she lent a half-petulant obedience to Guido's admonitions to hold her head steady and keep her face at the proper angle for the portrait. Finally, the Count proposed an expedition into the country, and the Countess clapped her hands in childish glee.

"Mais oui! mais oui! ce sera ravissant. Monsieur," turning to Guido, "you will forgive me, will you not? To-day is cool, and I shall enjoy myself. To-morrow that dreadful heat may return. Oh, yes! you will forgive me, I know. To-morrow? I do not know that I shall sit to-morrow. I may be tired. But you will make haste and finish the portrait of dear Elise. Yes! That will be kind." And

with an enchanting smile of absolute indifference the Countess fluttered off to dress, while the Count bowed Guido out.

For two or three days the artist awaited a summons from the Countess, but received it not. Too shy to write to her, he bore the disappointment with what patience he could, but at last he conceived the happy thought of calling upon the Count himself, with the information which he had asked for about the frames.

And on the very evening of the day on which Lucia had received from him the fifty francs he went.

On the same evening, and about the same hour, Tito, half wild with anxiety, had summoned Lucia to the bedside of his little Isoletta.

"Will you come to her for a little?" he prayed, haggard and breathless. "Cecchina is with her, but she asks for you. I will be back soon. I only go to a friend for money."

"Of course, I will go directly," answered Lucia, warmly. "What is it? Convulsions?"

"Starvation," answered Tito, grimly. "The doctor came just now, when I thought she was dying. He said that her throat was better, and that she should have some strong broth and a little wine. It's easy talking. Except some soup that Cecchina brought Isoletta, there has been no food in the house since yesterday, and I have earned no money for a fortnight and more."

Lucia impulsively put her hand in her pocket, but, alas! her own purse was empty. The rent which she had paid that afternoon had exhausted it. The scanty savings of many months, the week's earnings, and the proceeds of the cross—all were gone.

"Let me go and get some food!" she exclaimed. "The people know me. They will give me credit."

"And how shall I pay you?" asked Tito, with a bitter smile. "No, no, Signora Lucia, you are poor and you have helped me before; let me go to my friend. He belongs to our Società. He will help me, if he can."

"And if he cannot?" said Lucia.

Tito shrugged his shoulders with a sinister gesture of despair. "There are the rich," he answered, and went.

Poor little Isoletta lay like a corpse—so white, so still, so diaphanous in the pale moonbeams that, faint and ghost-like, illumined her bed. She moaned and started in her troubled sleep as Lucia bent over her, and her poor, tiny, wasted hand clutched feverishly at the sheet, her parched lips moved piteously.

"She sleeps. Will you stay with her for a little?" whispered Cecchina, a wizened, untidy little hunchback, with bright eyes like a bird.

Lucia nodded, and Cecchina, pocketing her knitting, noiselessly went.

Lucia sat for awhile by the bed, her compassionate eyes fixed on the small pathetic figure. She recalled the child's winning ways, her

happy smiles and wondering glances, her little world of unconscious joy in a big world of want and desolation, and so remembering her she felt a sob rise in her throat at the thought that perhaps already the short sum of Isoletta's days was spent. Oppressed by the loneliness, and restlessly anxious for Tito's return, she rose and went softly to the window.

It was a night such as we in England never dream of—a night of indescribable heat, and of most uncanny splendour. Over all things brooded the stifling sirocco; its burning breath came in baneful gusts that seemed like exhalations from a witch's cauldron. The quaint, tortuous streets, the sculptured gables of the dark, lofty houses, the yawning archways, were etherealised, transfigured by the intense white radiance of the moon. And yet, beautiful as the hour was, its spell had more of the weird than of the divine. There was some touch of mystic cruelty, of ghostly mockery in its maddening stillness and its inexorable calm.

In such electrical hours every feeling is at fever heat, and emotion with startling rapidity flames into crime.

"Ohé Pietro!" called a voice through the silence, and a man came running down the street to meet another. "A pistol-shot—murder—the guardie have just hurried past. Will you come to see?"

"Where? where?" cried the other. "How do you know?"

"I was passing. I heard the people say it. It is in ——"

Lucia leaned excitedly from the window. Surely he had mentioned —then she smiled at her own imagination. Two men had fallen out, and one had drawn a knife on the other, probably. The pistol-shot would be the mushroom growth of fancy. Very likely the wound was not even mortal. Such things are of constant recurrence in Italy.

Twenty minutes or so passed, then she heard Tito's step on the stairs. At the same moment Isoletta awoke in a startled way, calling out "Babbo! babbo!"

"Isoletta! see! I am returned. I have brought thee food, wine, and money for more," and Tito, pale with emotion and hurry, threw a heap of lire on the table.

"You found your friend, then?" said Lucia, pleased; but Tito was hunting for a glass and did not answer her.

"Two men in the street just now were speaking of a pistol-shot. Did you hear it?" asked the girl.

"Not I," said he. "I heard nothing. I should not have heard an earthquake, I think. I was thinking only of Isoletta here," and with a trembling hand he raised his darling's head, and put the life-giving draught to her lips.

CHAPTER IV.

BEPPINA'S NEWS.

Six o'clock the next evening found Lucia busily working, as she had been busily working all day. For it was Saturday, and only if she took her finished task to the shop before nightfall could she expect to be paid. Growing every moment paler, every moment wearier, she plied her needle with a kind of mechanical persistency, feeling that to stop for a moment would be to give up altogether.

Angela sat half-asleep by the window, with a cloud of flies buzzing round her head. Every now and again she awoke with a start to brush them off, then, with a fretful groan, relapsed into slumber. From the main street hard by came the harsh shouts of the newspaper vendors. They seemed to have some greater news than usual, but, probably despairing of a public there, they had not penetrated to the little piazzetta where Lucia lived.

Suddenly hurrying feet came up the stairs, and Angela raised her head, with a quick presentiment of some agreeable novelty. Beppina, breathless with excitement, exultant with the importance of a news-bringer, burst into the room.

"Have you heard? The Countess—your Countess, Lucia—has been murdered by Guido, the painter!"

"Guido!" shrieked Angela, springing to her feet, and turning her eyes on the speaker in sightless anger. "Shame! shame on you, Beppina, to carry such tales!"

Lucia had looked up, and perhaps she also had spoken. But if so, her exclamation had passed unheeded. She sat with pallid, parted lips, as motionless as though the news, like a poisoned arrow, had transfixed her dead to her chair.

"I carry no tales but true ones," said Beppina, indignantly, and half crying with agitation. "I only heard it just now, as I came home. The whole town knew it before me. You are always accusing me of telling lies. The *Avanguardia* has just come out with the whole account. Momo has bought it and is going to read it to us . . . I thought you would like to listen . . . I was a fool . . . I ought to have stayed downstairs . . . You are very unkind . . . I shall go."

"No, stop! I will go with you," said Angela, eagerly.

"What is the matter?" asked a voice at the door. It was Tito, come to give news of Isoletta. He had not slept all night, of course, and looked horribly haggard and wan. Delighted to have a new listener, the milliner poured out her story, interrupted by many exclamations from Angela.

"All newspapers are liars," growled Tito. "Isoletta is better, Signora Lucia." Then he turned his back and walked downstairs,

Beppina staring after him. What had come to the people to make them take her news in such a spirit?

"Come! let us go down," said Angela, impatiently. "Momo will have got through the whole article soon, and then nobody will think of telling me anything. I am only a poor, blind woman. My amusement is a small matter."

"Won't you come too, Lucia?" asked Beppina, glancing at her curiously, and disappointed, for she had looked forward to a scene.

"Lucia has her work to finish," interposed Angela, trembling with eagerness to begone. And, leaning on Beppina's arm, she stumbled down the stairs.

Left alone, Lucia raised her hand to her forehead, and pushed back her hair restlessly, as though its weight oppressed her. She looked round the room as if in search of something, like a person waking in some unfamiliar spot. Her eyes fell on her work, which had slipped to the ground. Habit is a kind of goad. She must finish that, at any rate, she thought, and, raising it, fell to stitching swiftly as before. She was curiously calm—so much so that she almost wondered at herself. The moment when Beppina's words had given her that dreadful shock seemed hours off already. An abyss of dull amaze had yawned in her soul, and every violent emotion had glided down it. She could hear what the news-sellers shouted now with startling distinctness. They rang the changes on the murder, the arrest—how often had she heard them call out similar facts before! Their words sounded horribly commonplace, with just one added touch of inconceivable novelty. If she could only get rid of this feeling of stupor, which hurt her like some bruising pressure!

Holding her work in front of her, she examined it critically, saying to herself that before the light failed it would be finished. . . . Then all at once she dropped it; rose from her seat; locked the door of the house behind her, and ran down the stairs, and out into the sickening, foul heat of the street. She hurried past the curious little group of listeners gathered round Momo, unconsciously wincing as a fragment of the reading reached her ears.

"Where are you going? Have you finished your work?" called out Angela, hearing that she had passed.

But Lucia did not answer, only hastened on, with such a white, set face that everybody who met her looked at her in pity. She walked mechanically, making straight for her goal, but heeding nothing by the way, until she reached at last a part of the town where reigned an almost cloistral silence. It had once been a quarter of convents, and tall walls stretched away on either side, shutting out the sight but not the rustle of the gardens, where parched acacia blossoms dropped, one by one, to the ground. Here Lucia paused for a moment, briefly asked her way, and turning down the street pointed out to her, found

herself in front of the town prison. A sentinel was before the door. She went up to him.

"Was Guido Zondara brought here to-day?—he is a painter," she added impatiently, as the soldier stared at her in surprise.

"I don't know. Ask the porter," he replied, and resumed his impassibility.

Lucia turned to the porter, and repeated her question in the very same words.

"Do you suppose I know the names of all the people who are brought here?" said that functionary, munching a hunk of bread and salame. "You must ask there," and he pointed to a kind of bureau within the court. But a woman standing by, talking to one of the jailors, had heard Lucia's question.

"A painter?" she repeated. "Why, of course, it was that handsome lad brought this afternoon for murder. You know him? Poor thing! poor thing!" and the shrill tones subsided into a cadence of passing sympathy, and the black eyes fixed themselves on Lucia with inquisitive interest.

"You can be allowed to see him on visitors' day," said the porter, answering the glance, more fraught with despairing longing than she guessed, which the girl had cast through the sombre doorway to the building beyond.

"You are his sweetheart, perhaps?" questioned the woman.

"No," said Lucia, "I am nothing to him." Then she turned and left them. The sight of the prison, the knowledge that Guido was really there, had roused her from her apathy, and awakened in her an intolerable pain. The formless horror and incredulity which had oppressed her brain suddenly lifted, and were succeeded by a rush of ghastly images. An overpowering desire to know more, to get closer, as it were, to the hideous fact, possessed her. She quickened her steps, and in a short time found herself in front of the palace where the murdered woman had dwelt. Two men with flaming torches stood at the door, and the portal was full of the white-robed, white-hooded Brothers who, in Italy, carry the dead. Evidently the funeral was about to take place.

A small pony-carriage dashed up ,inside which were two ladies, friends of Countess Wanda, whom Lucia knew by sight.

They had brought a cross of gardenias and Cape jessamine, to lay upon the coffin; and now looked round for somebody who would carry it upstairs.

Divining their desire, Lucia went forward, eagerly. "I will take it."

"Ah! c'est la petite brodeuse! Poor Wanda was kind to her. Yes, give the cross to her to take," said one of the ladies, glad to be released from the necessity of exertion on such a sultry night.

Swiftly, silently, Lucia passed up the stairs, through the groups of Brothers, of servants, and of guests with long faces of assumed

solemnity, that broke every now and again into smiles of real indifference.

On the landing stood two gentlemen talking.

"I was at the baths of Lucca, and came up this afternoon as soon as I received the telegram. Poor woman! so beautiful! so young! such a tragic end!" said one.

"Cioronski is overwhelmed, I suppose?" observed the other.

"To tell you the truth," answered the first speaker, lowering his voice confidentially, "I am quite uneasy about him. His conduct is strange. This morning he was wildly excited; asked endless questions; hurried on all the formalities; insisted upon the body being removed to-night, saying he could not be another night in the same house with it. And yet he would not leave, though of course everybody was profuse in invitations. Up to an hour ago he would not approach the corpse, only insisted perpetually that it must 'Go—go.' And now, there he is in the room with it, kneeling by the coffin, praying perhaps, and nobody dares go near him, his manner is so distraught."

"Is there not—you understand?" said the other gentleman, significantly tapping his forehead.

At this moment they perceived Lucia behind them, and heard at last her softly-spoken request to pass. They moved aside, and she went on. She had heard what they were saying, but apparently had not heeded it; or else the dumb fascination of horror which possessed her left no room in her mind for scruples. Impelled by an irresistible impulse, she made straight for a door slightly ajar, through which streamed a flood of light, and a heavy scent of incense and of flowers. A servant darted forward to prevent her entering, but was not in time. Bearing the cross of flowers she advanced, noiseless as a spirit and almost as pale.

The murdered woman was known to have loved light, and perhaps for that reason tapers had been multiplied round her coffin, until the blaze was almost dazzling. She lay in their lustre, surrounded and covered with flowers, her face alone visible.

With a throb of agony and awe Lucia recognised the outstretched wax-like figure, the little golden head, and was seized by the solemn wonder of the living at the newborn mystery shrouding the familiar figure of the dead. She moved a step nearer, breathless, her heart-beats sounding loudly through the silence. Dead? No! Surely some mighty longing would revive her, as the touch of the Redeemer raised the lifeless of old. Lucia mechanically stretched out her arms, a sob of speechless desire parting her sad lips. Was it only the flicker of the tapers, or a returning breath that quivered on the marble cheek?

"Wanda!"

The name breathed through the room like a sigh, but Lucia never knew that she had spoken. She stood rapt, chilled by a

sense of the eternally irrevocable, and yet trembling with a vague expectancy.

There was a slight stir, and, from the other side of the coffin, where he had been kneeling unobserved by Lucia, Count Cioronski rose, with a face so livid, so altered out of all knowledge, that she shrank from him as from a ghost. He stared at her for a moment in silence; then all at once his countenance changed, an expression compounded of fury and of terror swept across it, and with a stealthy spring, like a wild beast's, he threw himself upon her and seized her by the throat. A short, silent struggle took place between them; but Lucia's slender hands were no match for the muscular ones that held her, strengthened as they were by some maniacal instinct of blood. Already half-suffocated she had sunk to the ground, when the door was thrown violently backwards, and the terrified servants rushed in. The guests followed, and two men catching the Count in their arms, forced him to release his grasp. He wrestled with them for a moment, then fell back insensible and foaming at the mouth.

The maids, meanwhile, had dragged the half-fainting Lucia into the antechamber, and there loosened her dress and dashed water in her face. With a moan she came to herself after a few moments, and looked at them with bewildered eyes.

"Madonna santa!" said one of them, "why did you go in? It was a mere chance that through the door I caught sight of him holding you. I have seen him in awful rages before, but never like this."

A gentleman came out hurriedly.

"How is the girl?" he asked. "Ah! better. Send for a doctor, Carlotta. The Count is in an epileptic fit."

An hour later poor Countess Wanda's funeral streamed slowly down the street, with all the pomp that flaming torches, chanting priests, and decorous mourners could give it.

A great crowd had gathered along its passage, and by the time the procession reached the cemetery it had been swelled by a number of humble followers. These were some of the many sufferers whom the generous hand of the murdered woman had succoured.

(To be continued.)

HUGH LATIMER.

ONE afternoon in the year 1490, a man, wearing the dress of a common country farmer of that day, might have been seen crossing the rich green fields near the village of Thurcaston in Leicestershire. His face seemed to show that he was in no very cheerful frame of mind. The weather had been gloomy, the crops were looking bad, one of the very best bullocks had just gone the wrong way. Altogether the farmer was not disposed, that evening, to take a very bright view of life, especially of his own share of it.

But when he drew near his own door, the door where the porch was all ablush with red roses, his face suddenly lit up with a look of anxious interest. There was a sound in the house which had not been in it when he left it this morning : it was the cry of a child. With quick steps his heavy mud-stained boots crossed the threshold. There, from a group of gossips, he heard that there was born to him a son.

That boy was christened Hugh, and was to leave a story written on the page of English history which would have nothing to do with farm-yards or cattle-breeding. He was to be known, in after time, as Hugh Latimer, the champion of God even to the death.

Hugh's childhood was very like the childhood of any other boy of his day who was in his position of life : that is to say, it was like the childhood of others in all its outward surroundings. There was the store of legendary lore learnt at his mother's knee ; there was the rough and ready initiation into the everyday ways and habits of the world, which, in that age, fell to the lot of a lad in Hugh Latimer's rank of life; there were frequent visits to the house of the parish priest, who was the unfailing patron of every intelligent village boy, to pick up fragments of Greek and Latin, and of gentle manners above his station ; fragments which a quick-witted lad like Hugh Latimer would soon join together, till they became a harmonious whole that determined the course of his future story.

The childhood of Hugh Latimer must have had yet another thing, which did not belong to every home then, which does not belong to every home now. That other thing was a solid groundwork of high principle and pure feeling. We know neither the name nor the lineage of Hugh Latimer's mother. She may have been the daughter of some wealthy yeoman who descended a few steps to marry the small farmer, or she may have been once a waiting-maid who arranged the silken robes of some grand lady. No pen or pencil has told us whether her hair was tinged with Norman black or Saxon brown. But still, between the lines of her great son's story, we can see her influence written as by a recording angel's loving finger.

Thus time went on, while year by year strengthening limbs and firm elastic steps told of vigorous bodily development in breeze and sunshine; while year by year, through books partly borrowed and partly bought by hard-earned savings, his young mind drank deeper from the well of knowledge; while year by year the young spirit looked out bolder and with a steadier gaze into life. Thus time went on, until the boy had become a youth. And now what was to be his lot? Was he to stick to the plough and the spade of his forefathers, or was he to try to spring into some higher walk of life? His intellect and his whole nature made him long for different companionship and different employment from that he found in the old Leicestershire farmhouse; but there seemed little hope of his gaining either.

In truth, in those days of slow progress and rigid barriers between class and class, it appeared a very vain dream to think of the small farmer's son treading college halls at the side of young nobles and high-born gentlemen, and rising to be the friend of a king. But God had work for him to do in high places, and thither now He began to guide his steps. Latimer had, as yet, no idea of the glorious task his Lord was going to lay upon him. His religious convictions were, at present, all on the side of the Roman Catholic Church, which had, in some degree, befriended him, and helped him into the path of secular learning. But the Almighty Hand was leading him on towards the light, though he himself knew it not. Through the name made for him by his own already brilliant talents in his native county, through the generous kindness of some neighbouring gentlemen of rank and wealth, he was sent to Cambridge, and thus his first step upward was assured to him.

At Cambridge he soon made his mark. He gathered swiftly the golden fruit of all academic honours, and his strong individuality quickly made him both friends and enemies in the university. Every one that was brought into near contact with him saw plainly enough that here was one of the rising men of the young generation. He was not, however, exactly a popular man in his college. His words were too keen and brisk, his whole being too bristling with lively, original force for that: but where he won a heart he never lost it again.

Hugh Latimer was, at this period, sufficiently attached to the Roman Catholic Church to resolve to enter her priesthood: the clerical profession seemed to him the one which would suit him best, on account of his love of study. Accordingly, when he reached the usual age, he took holy orders. It was quite impossible for the restless energy of his nature to remain long in any position without making some active movement in it. Before much time had passed, therefore, after his becoming a priest, we find Latimer delivering lectures at Cambridge, in which he combated some of the opinions of the reformers.

But the young warrior was very soon to buckle on his armour in a different cause.

One day there came into the hall where the lecturer was hurling the keen darts of his oratory at the ranks of Protestantism, a plainly-dressed, middle-aged man, with a grave uncompromising mouth, but with a wondrous, calm sunshine in his eyes—sunshine which seemed to stream out from the radiance of the soul within. No one took any particular notice of him, and he sat down in a corner. When he first fixed his attention on the lecturer, as he did throughout in the most marked way, there was stern opposition in his glance, but, by degrees, that unfriendly look turned to one of admiration, and then his face grew very earnest and thoughtful, and then he gazed again eagerly at the speaker, and then he murmured, "He shall be God's and ours! He shall be God's and ours!"

The lecture was over, and Latimer had returned to his own lodging when there came a knock at the house door. Was it one of the dons come to compliment him on the way in which he had stood, to-day, by the rights of the clergy, he wondered, as he heard a quick, resolute step ascending the stairs. The room door opened, and a man, who was an utter stranger to Latimer, stood before him. He was the man, with sunshine in his eyes, who, without the speaker being aware of his presence, had been listening to his lecture.

"Who are you, sir, and what would you with me?" asked Latimer, in surprise.

"I am Thomas Bilney," was the answer, "and I come to make thee, Hugh Latimer, a changed man from this day."

At the name of Bilney, which was, at that period, as a trumpet's blast throughout the camp of the English reformers, Latimer started, and a flash of anger from his fiery glance met the bright, steadfast gaze of the man who stood before him, calm as a summer cloud, yet boldly assured as an angel which had just come down from God with a message.

At first Latimer refused to have any intercourse with his unexpected and unwelcome guest. But the persuasive sweetness of Bilney's manner at length melted his coldness and distrust, and gradually he fell into talk and discussion with him. Before Bilney left his room that day, Latimer was beginning to look at the reformed doctrines with a very different eye from what he had ever done hitherto. He studied the scriptures in the new light which was shining in upon him. God's grace worked in his heart and mind, together with his new friend's teaching, for friends the two had become, though they had met as antagonists. His vigorous intellect and warm, brave spirit soon grasped hold of the glorious truths which were now presented to him. He was far too honest and bold not to confess, at once, his altered convictions, and it was rapidly spread abroad that Hugh Latimer was numbered among the opponents of the Church of Rome.

Just at this moment, when Latimer's views changed, to be a reformer was not exactly to play a losing game in a merely worldly point of aspect in England. It was one of those periods in Henry

VIII.'s life when he took it into his head to be a Protestant, and to favour Protestantism in all things. Latimer's new friends knew this, and resolved to introduce him at Court. He was just the sort of man they wanted to place near the King.

One day there waited in the ante-chamber of King Henry's reception room a singularly contrasted pair. One wore a long black gown and a heavy gold chain: his whole manner and bearing, even to the very tone of his softly modulated voice, were full of the most studied, courtly grace. He was spruce elegance itself, from the jaunty little beaver cap stuck slightly on one side upon his perfumed hair, to the diamond that glittered on his delicate white hand: his very approach seemed to bring with it a smell of rare precious odours, and an atmosphere of dignified forms.

The other wore a doublet made of a somewhat coarser stuff, and of a decidedly country cut. His every movement was the embodiment of restless eagerness of purpose, that was combined with vast energy of will. There was often something almost awkward in his abrupt turns of head or limb. He spoke rapidly, and in short sentences filled with meaning. He strode up and down, as if he were already more than half tired of this his first experience of waiting for royalty.

These two were Dr. Butts, the Court physician, who was to present Hugh Latimer at Court, and Hugh Latimer himself.

At length the page in waiting came to announce that His Majesty was ready to receive the physician and his friend. The doctor, who was beginning to feel rather like one of his own chemicals undergoing a dissolving process, at the thought of standing godfather before royalty to this too ready-tongued, too active-limbed young divine, whispered a few more hurried, imploring words of caution into his companion's ear, and they were ushered into the King's presence.

For a few minutes Dr. Butts stood by in a state of anxiety which was more exciting than pleasant. Then his face began to beam with a smile of relief and satisfaction. Young Latimer had evidently leapt at once high up into royal favour. No monarch ever knew better than Henry VIII. how to discover, in a short interview, rare qualities of heart and head; and there was a freshness and originality about Latimer which more than compensated, in the King's eyes, for his want of courtly manners. Latimer's great success, however, was when he preached his first sermon before the King: his vigorous eloquence was poured out upon the Court literally like a waterfall, carrying all hearts along with it. And yet he told them no half truths, nor did he scruple to hold up before them gilded vice in all its unmasked hideousness.

The first piece of preferment Henry VIII. gave Latimer was the rich living of West Kington, in Wiltshire, from which he was, of course, from time to time to return to preach before His Majesty. At Kington his zeal in visiting from house to house, and his power in the pulpit, soon set the whole parish in a stir of spiritual life such

as it had not known for years. He led his people into the full light of gospel truth, and they followed him willingly and lovingly. But that light was too striking a contrast to the darkness in the neighbouring towns and villages not to arouse violent opposition. Latimer was accused at Court by some of the higher clergy of preaching heresy. The changeable mind of Henry had, lately, turned back again towards Roman Catholicism. Latimer was arrested and put in prison for his opinions.

Latimer bore this reverse of fortune as bravely and calmly as he had carried himself modestly in the sunshine of royal favour. He had never forgotten the words, "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put any confidence in princes." He had fair and sweet consolation with Him in his prison cell; he had the rich treasures stored in his mind; he had his steadfast consciousness of having stood firmly by His standard: best and dearest of all, he knew that the martyr's King was keeping loving and mighty watch over him.

But the martyr's crown was not just yet to be his, though, doubtless, at that time of hot, religious persecution he may have deemed it very near his brow. In those days the wheel of fortune turned quickly for many a man. King Henry veered round again to a leaning towards the reformed doctrines. Cranmer, Latimer's friend, came into power and favour at Court, and Latimer was set at liberty.

Soon after this, the King, who had resumed all his old liking for Latimer, made him Bishop of Worcester. From the rickety stool in a prisoner's cell to a bishop's throne the change was startling, and wide enough to make even the best balanced brain dizzy. But Latimer's noble Christian character bore the test like real gold. He was as simple and straightforward in his palace as he had been in his father's farmhouse. He was as earnest and active in his diocese as he had been in his parish. There was nothing too small and lowly that concerned the interests of his people which he did not look into. He never forgot—his true heart could not forget—that he was the servant of a Master Who had once lain in a manger: in his rapid movements through Worcester, and the whole county, he might be compared to a kindly light which went flashing hither and thither.

Latimer was not to fill long his new sphere of usefulness. When he had been Bishop of Worcester but a few years, Henry VIII. drew up six articles of belief, and made it law that every bishop and clergyman in England should sign them. Latimer could not conscientiously do this, for these articles, in his opinion, savoured too much of the errors of Rome; and so he resigned his bishopric. This was a deadly offence in the eyes of the arbitrary King. If Latimer would not stay quiet in his palace at Worcester, where he had been pleased to place him, he was not going to let him have peace and freedom anywhere else. He would dispose, at least, of his refractory subject's person, if he could not of his conscience. Before Latimer knew well where he was, he was standing behind locked doors in the Tower. The axe was now,

once more, hanging over Latimer's head, but again the Lord sent His angel to hold His shining shield between it and His servant and soldier. The King never proceeded any further against him. Truly he might cry out, with the apostle of old, "As dying, and behold I live."

At the death of Henry VIII., and the accession of Edward VI., Latimer was recalled to Court, and was covered with honours, being made one of the preachers to the King. The picture of one of these Court sermons preached by him stands out so freshly and distinctly, and is so full of bright colouring, that we cannot help pausing to glance at it for a moment.

What a stir and bustle is going on at early dawn on this fine spring morning in the garden of the palace of Westminster. What a rattle of hammers, what a hurrying hither and thither of servants, what a clatter of many voices. The noise has awoke up the birds, and overhead they are making a most musical din. The weather is so bright and warm, and there are so many messages from the coming summer in the sunshine and the soft breeze, that it has been decided that the sermon which the King and Court are to hear to-day is to be preached in the open air, and a temporary pulpit is being put up in the garden, and they are arranging seats for the congregation. The garden is peopled with old-fashioned English spring flowers; there is a glow of crocuses and a white glimmer of snowdrops, and a bed of violets is sending up a whole censer full of perfume.

And now the fair and gallant company begin to assemble. The many-coloured silk robes of the ladies sweep softly across the smooth turf, the velvet doublets of the gentlemen glisten in the sunshine, their swords ring lightly as they tread. The brilliant crowd are giving way respectfully now, to make room for a lady. With what graceful dignity she moves! What flashes of power shine out in her face, though the morning of her girlhood is still in her eyes, though her looks are so demure. With what a coquettish hand she touches her head-gear. Those around her glance at her with pride and pleasure in their faces; but, still, they have no thought of the many pages of English history her life is to cover. To them she is only their bright young Princess Elizabeth.

But who is she who sits a little apart, as if in quiet, solemn musing? Sits apart, with the sunbeams playing in her hair. The slender, willow-like form is the form of a child, but the face is the face of a thoughtful angel. That little hand was never made to bear the sceptre's weight. Oh! let her know no other sovereignty except the sovereignty of home, with her husband's heart safe in her warm, sweet keeping; with her baby girl on her knee, with her gallant boy gazing up into her eyes. But they heed not the tenderness of her youth, the modest graces of her spirit. They will hurry the crown upon her head, to make way in a few brief days for the fatal axe! Yet shall a crown eternally be hers. Yet shall she be spoken of in all time as almost a martyr, that ten days queen who is to be, Lady Jane Grey.

We hear voices at one of the palace windows just above us, and looking up we see two heads there—the head of a grave, middle-aged man, who seems to have heart and mind heavily laden with some great weight of care or of business, for smiles are rare upon his lips, and there is a shadow on his brow; and the head of a boy, a head in which pale cheeks and eyes too deeply earnest for his young years tell of brain-work and labours that have gone beyond the strength of the frail, childish body. These are the youthful King and the Lord Protector Somerset. They will not go down into the garden with the rest; they will hear the sermon at the window.

But now make way for the preacher. He comes with quick, firm step, and erect form. He is in the pulpit, and his bright, eagle glance flashes across the whole vast assembly. At first his words come slowly and a little ponderously, but very soon the tide of mighty, God-given eloquence is flowing on in its full force. His words burn as they leap from his lips. He strikes at every pet vice of the age, as if he wielded the thunderbolts of God. There is nothing flowery in his oratory; it it is all plain, straightforward, often homely English: yet he will keep that highly-cultivated, high-born audience spell-bound for four hours.

Those were the busiest and most prosperous days of Hugh Latimer's life, and we catch glimpses of his tall, muscular figure, now striding down into the country to preach to a retired rustic congregation, now sitting at some Court banquet at the side of one of those fair, spiritually-minded ladies who shone starlike round the Boy King, and exchanging sweet converse about things human and divine; now speaking out a bold, warning word to check the folly or the luxury of a young noble. Everywhere his keen directness of speech, and his shrewd insight into character, and his hearty, sympathetic nature, made him a brave, successful worker for God and man. We fancy, even now, we can hear his full deep voice, with its Leicestershire burr, which it never wholly lost, sounding among the dainty accents of young gallants and damsels, as he discussed some point of scholarship with a brother clergyman, or talked of things higher still with the young King, who loved and honoured him as a father in God. At this period, also, he spent some time in Lincolnshire, where he preached six celebrated sermons, which even to-day, as we read them, are all alight with fire from above.

With the accession of Mary there came a great change for Latimer. He became at once an object of distrust and persecution. He was arrested, and as they led him through Smithfield he cried out, in his own quaint way, "This place has been groaning for me these many days." But it was not at Smithfield, it was at Oxford, that he sprang from his martyr pyre to join the company of the saints at rest on high.

ALICE KING.

A FASHIONABLE MARRIAGE.

I.

HOW insufferably hot the day has been! During its whole course not one little breeze has stirred the scorching summer air; and now, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the roads and pavements are still baking in the broad glare of the July sun. The sky is one clear expanse of intense blue, undimmed by a single cloud. No chance of the slightest wind at present.

In a room of one of the houses in Berkeley Square two girls are seated. The very room itself is an exquisite rest to the eye after the glare outside. It is furnished in pale blue satin and creamy lace, and possesses every suitable elegance of modern life, with copies of some of the rarest pictures and sculpture the world can boast for the admiring eye to study. Soft light, filtered through a balcony filled with choice flowers; cool, scented air; vases and bowls filled with exquisite hot-house blossoms—surely this little room were fitting shrine for even a royal beauty.

It is Lady Geraldine Treherne's boudoir; and Lady Geraldine herself is seated in the shadiest part of the room with her friend, Miss Parkhurst, a fair, tranquil-looking girl, with clear, penetrating eyes, and a firm, well-shaped mouth. She is not, strictly speaking, a friend of Lady Geraldine's. That can scarcely be, considering they have not met until now for more than five years, and their correspondence has been of the sparest. There can hardly be much in common between the daughter of the Earl of Strathmere and the child of a superannuated major.

How comes it to pass, then, that Miss Parkhurst is in London for the purpose of acting in the charming capacity of bridesmaid to Lady Geraldine, whose wedding is to take place within three weeks?

We must go back a little.

When Lady Geraldine was sixteen she was, with her mother, visiting some friends in the picturesque old county of Brookshire. At a flower-show she met Major Parkhurst's pretty daughter, and took a great fancy to her. Afterwards, in her walks, she often fell in with the young lady, and the fancy ripened into true liking. She extorted from the Countess reluctant permission to visit Bramble Cottage, the Major's residence, where, to her delight, she found a host of merry brothers and sisters living in a scrambling, happy fashion, new and delightful to the Lady Geraldine.

A warm friendship sprang up between the Earl's daughter and the family at Bramble Cottage, and they parted with mutual regret.

The following summer a timidly worded letter came from Annie

Parkhurst asking Lady Geraldine to come and stay with them. At first the Countess was inexorable, but her daughter begged so earnestly and with such entreaties that, hard and cold as she was, she at last yielded—but with a condition. It must be the first and last visit. Lady Geraldine would move in an entirely different sphere from the people she was so anxious to cultivate, therefore a continued friendship was out of the question.

Lady Geraldine, wise in her generation, promised to abide by her mother's decision. After that long, bright, summer visit she saw no more of her friends; and the years rolled on.

One morning, about five weeks before the day arranged for Lady Geraldine's wedding, the Countess was startled by her daughter's saying suddenly: "Mamma, I am going to ask Annie Parkhurst to be one of my bridesmaids. I shall write to-day."

The Countess had forgotten the very existence of so unimportant a personage; but when she fully understood to whom her daughter was alluding, she said, in the icy tones peculiar to her: "My dear, it is impossible."

Lady Geraldine, a totally different person from the impulsive young lady of years before, observed coolly, and with unruffled composure: "We must contrive to make it possible, mamma. It is the first wish I have expressed, and I do not mean it to be set aside. You have had whole and sole arrangement of everything so far, but I claim the right of choosing *something* in connection with my wedding, though it be not the husband."

Miss Parkhurst was invited, and is now in Lady Geraldine's boudoir, watching and listening to her ladyship with eyes full of wonder at the change the years have wrought. Can this exquisite, weary-eyed woman, with her pale face, and calm, languid bearing, be the same being as the bright, winsome girl who charmed everybody by her sweetness and vivacity in the days gone by?

She gives vent to her thoughts at last. "You are greatly changed, Lady Geraldine."

"Am I?" queries the young lady. "I cannot return the compliment, Annie. There is little difference in you, unless it be that you are more formal. You used to call me Geraldine."

"Ah, but that is so long ago," says Annie, deprecatingly.

"Yes; five years is a long time—especially to look forward to," and Lady Geraldine sighs as though she regretted the fact.

"I have been here three days," says Miss Parkhurst presently, "and you have not yet told me anything about Lord Windholm. What is he like?"

Lady Geraldine fans herself gently. "My dear, he is so totally uninteresting that I never dreamed of discussing him. As to his appearance, he returns to town to-night and will dine with us, so you can then form your own opinion."

"Geraldine! do you mean what you say?"

"What did I say?"

"That the Earl of Windholm, so soon to be your husband, is totally uninteresting to you. Have you no love for him?"

"To tell the truth, my indifference to him almost amounts to dislike, but I have not sufficient energy left to exert the feeling."

"But this is dreadful!" cries Miss Parkhurst, more shocked than she could express. "And shall you really marry him?"

"Of course I shall. Are not you going to be one of my bridesmaids? Why, Annie, how horrified you look. Of what are you thinking?"

"It seems to me a fearful thing to marry a man you confess you dislike," replies Annie. "What *can* be the result of such a union?"

Lady Geraldine shrugs her shoulders slightly. "Surely, Annie, you don't see the duty I owe to my position. It is necessary I should marry. Mamma says I must make room for my sisters, Florence and Mabel, who are ready to be brought out. She says I have run the gauntlet of three seasons and am already getting shelved. It, therefore, being necessary for me to marry, who could be a more suitable husband than Lord Windholm? He belongs to an ancient family, is not more than thirty, is fairly good-looking, and a thorough Conservative. Of course he has some trifling faults. He is dull and rather dense in most things, and I believe an adept in the art of drinking. But it is not necessary to say any more; you will be able to judge for yourself when you see him to-night." And the young lady dismisses the subject with another little shrug.

Her friend still looks shocked and incredulous.

"Does the Countess wish you to marry him?"

"Why, Annie, you do not suppose I should be so undutiful as to marry without my parents' approval. Mamma would have preferred my having the Marquis of Rotherham, who proposed last year, and she was really annoyed at the time by what she termed my perversity in refusing to accept the withered old man, with his dyed hair and false teeth. He actually used to make me shudder, and I am not easily moved. But, Annie, let us quit these subjects; tell me about yourself and your home. Does the dear old house look the same?"

"I will tell you all about it," returns Miss Parkhurst, "but just answer me one question first. Are you happy, Geraldine?"

"Happy? Well, no; I can't say that I am particularly so. But it is not the lot of human nature to be happy, and I dare say I am no worse off than the rest of the world."

"But if you were not to marry this earl?"

"Well, then I should marry some one else just as wearisome; perhaps worse; some one actively stupid instead of inanely so. Annie, would you just touch that little bell beside you; we will have some tea: and if you don't mind we will stay quietly here till the dressing-bell rings; it is positively too hot to drive to-day. How thankful I should be to hear the plash of rain! This hot weather

tires me dreadfully. Now tell me about Kate and Marion and the boys."

"Kate is very happy in the pretty little vicarage with her husband and children," says Annie, her face brightening as she spoke: "and Marion is engaged to Dr. Wylde. I think she will be married in the autumn."

"And Annie?" queries Lady Geraldine.

"She will stay at home and take care of her father and the children," laughs Annie. "Since mamma died and Kate married, I have taken charge of everything. I don't know how they are managing without me now—our servants are quite inexperienced."

"And your brothers?"

"Reginald and Harry are both studying for doctors; Reggie is walking the hospitals."

"And what is Jack doing?" asks Lady Geraldine, raising her scent-bottle to her nose. Is it the crimson glass that casts that delicate flush on her pale face?

"Poor Jack!" says Annie with a sigh. Geraldine looks up but does not speak.

"A friend of papa's got him into the army," continues Annie, 'but he left it in less than two years. He is the most restless and unsatisfied of us all, and cannot make up his mind what to do. His present idea is to go to New Zealand and make a home for himself, and I am afraid he is in earnest this time. I wish I could go with him; he is so impulsive and warm-hearted, he will never be happy so far from every creature who loves him. I cannot think what possesses him to be so different from what he was. Don't you remember, Geraldine, he used to be the merriest of all the boys? He had the clearest whistle and the merriest laugh of them all, and now he is quiet, nay, even gloomy at times. Perhaps he will be happier when he has carved out a future for himself."

"Yes," says Lady Geraldine absently, with eyes looking into vacancy; and Miss Parkhurst, thinking she has bored her, holds her peace.

The first dressing-bell rings, and Annie, not liking to disturb her friend's reverie, goes quietly out, closing the door after her.

What is the picture Lady Geraldine's grey eyes are gazing at so earnestly?

She sees a long, rambling, untidy garden, bathed in the soft light of a summer evening, and filled with a hundred subtle scents.

Two figures are wandering up and down the paths—two figures well worth looking at. A fair girl, with a beautiful, patrician face, and a form exquisite in its girlish grace and roundness. Her companion is a young man who would have formed a fitting model for Hercules. Added to the superb proportions of his figure, he possesses a manly, honest face, inspiring confidence and trust. After making the tour of the garden in silence, the girl raises her eyes to her companion's

face, and says quickly, "I wonder if you will ever think of me after I return home to-morrow."

The young man's face becomes suddenly dyed with crimson, and then as suddenly grows perfectly white.

"Geraldine, do you think there will be one day of my life in which I shall *not* think of you? The thought of to-morrow is worse than death to me."

"Oh, Jack!" she exclaims involuntarily, catching her breath.

They have come to a halt under the old, wide-spreading oak at the end of the garden, and Lady Geraldine is looking down, unable to meet Jack Parkhurst's reproachful eyes.

He lays his hand gently on her arm. "Look up, dear; I do not want to frighten or pain you. There is no need to tell you how I love you; you must know it. I love you with a love that will last my life; a love that is as true as it is hopeless. Oh, Geraldine, my darling, if only our fates had been moulded differently! mine higher, or your's lower! Tell me," he continues passionately, "if our positions had been reversed, do you—could you have loved me?"

Low, but distinctly, comes the answer, "I love you now."

For one moment a great joy illumines the young fellow's handsome face. "I can bear all now," he says eagerly. "But, Geraldine," more slowly, "do you think—is it possible there can be any hope for us?"

"Ah, no," she answers quickly, with a sob in her voice. "If you knew my mother you would not dream of such a thing. My fate is already carved out for me."

The happy light is gone out of his eyes as quickly as it came.

"I might have known," he says sadly, "it was an idle question. Our paths will separate to-morrow, never to cross again. Who can limit the endurance of the human heart? I know that to-morrow the light of my life will be gone from me, and yet, in all probability, that life will last thirty or forty years. I should not mind if it came to an end to-night."

"Oh, Jack! do not say that; think of your mother and sisters. You know how they love you."

"Yes, I know. And they are very dear to me. But every affection pales beside the love I bear for you; and I must pray for strength to live it down, to try and forget you and your fair, sweet face. But it is getting chilly; we must go in."

Lady Geraldine is crying quietly, but the tears are bitter and scalding, and give no relief.

She allows herself to be led down the dusky path. The shadows are gathering fast. The fair beauty of the summer evening has given place to a subdued, ominous calm—sure herald of a storm. Lady Geraldine's long white dress sweeping round her tall form gives her an unearthly look in the peculiar light. She hastens her steps as a roll of distant thunder is heard, preceded by a flash of lightning.

Once safe in the house she heaves a sigh, her heart beating with suppressed excitement.

Jack looks anxiously into her white, frightened face. With a sudden movement for which he is not prepared she lays her head against his shoulder. Instantly his strong arms are round her, his warm lips pressed to her trembling ones. "Oh, my darling, how shall I ever let you go!"

For one minute they stand thus, the girl's slender form held in a close, warm embrace; but at last she frees herself, and, without word or look, hurries away.

Lady Geraldine's face loses something that night which it never afterwards regains.

The second dressing-bell rings, loud and clear. Lady Geraldine Treherne gathers up her fan and scent-bottle, and goes to her room, where her maid is waiting in wondering impatience.

II.

When Miss Parkhurst, daintily attired in pale blue, enters the drawing-room, she finds the Countess in conversation with a tall, dark man whom she rightly guesses to be the Earl of Windholm. Lady Strathmere greets her affably and introduces her to Geraldine's fiancé. Strenuously as her ladyship opposed the coming of her daughter's friend, and much as she would have liked to prevent it, still, having invited her, she acts as a lady would, and treats her as an honoured guest.

Annie thinks Lord Windholm decidedly good-looking, though his expression is far from pleasant, and his eyes are cold and piercing. He makes a few commonplace remarks to her, in the middle of which Lord Strathmere enters, followed shortly by the butler, announcing dinner. The Earl of Strathmere is the very opposite of his stately wife, being a portly, good-tempered looking man, with honest blue eyes and a weak, irresolute mouth. "Where is Geraldine?" he says, after greeting his son-in-law elect; "another of those tiresome head-aches, eh?"

"I think she is quite well," the Countess answers coolly. "Geraldine never hurries herself in warm weather."

Lord Windholm smiles disagreeably, and mutters something about teaching her punctuality. At that moment she enters with a few words of apology for being late, and they repair to the dining-room. Another of Geraldine's habits in warm weather is to eat about sufficient to feed a canary, so that it is with a little sigh of relief she rises from the dessert-table to follow her mother to the drawing-room. The long, low windows are open to admit every breath of air, but the heat is still oppressive. "Annie," says Lady Geraldine, looking intently at

the sky, "is not that a little cloud over there? Surely there is promise of rain at last?"

"Yes, it will rain soon," replies Miss Parkhurst. "See, the curtains are moving. It is the first sign of a breeze we have had to-day."

The girls stand perfectly still, watching the clouds gathering. The heat becomes intense, the sky is black; then a great drop of rain falls, followed quickly by another, and another. In less than a minute a deluge is coming down. Lady Geraldine stands perfectly still, heedless that the rain is splashing on her from the plants and ferns in the window. Annie has wisely retired.

"Are you taking a shower-bath under novel circumstances?" asks Lord Windholm, coming up to his lady-love unnoticed by her.

She starts slightly. "Is it not refreshing! But how wet I am! I was so absorbed in watching the welcome shower that I did not feel its effects on myself."

"When you have finished rain-gazing perhaps you will kindly favour us with a little music," continues Lord Windholm.

"I shall be delighted, when I have had my dress changed." And she is turning away, when her hand is seized by her lover.

"What have you been doing during my absence, Geraldine?"

"About the same as usual. Driving, riding, walking, reading, and sleeping. Have you any particular reason for asking?"

"No, except that you are pale and preoccupied. It vexes me to see you looking white and thin."

"That is a pity, as I certainly have a predisposition that way. It is a comfort to think one can always resort to art if nature proves fickle. By such assistance I may be able yet to maintain your dignity, Guy."

"Do not be sarcastic; I am quite satisfied with you," returned Lord Windholm. "There are only one or two little things I should like to alter."

Lady Geraldine makes a little mocking bow of pretended humility, and quits the room.

The church of St. Nicholas is thronged from the pulpit to the door as early as ten o'clock on the morning of the marriage of Lady Geraldine Treherne to the Earl of Windholm. The day was announced in most of the fashionable papers and a vast number of persons are collected to see the wedding of the beauty of three seasons. Admission to the body of the church is granted only to the lucky possessors of tickets, but at last even these have to be turned away, as the church is full.

Gathered round the altar are the wedding guests, a goodly number of the highest members of the aristocracy, chatting and buzzing in undertones, while they wait for the bride. The eight bridesmaids, in shimmering dresses of ruby and cream colour—an elegant Parisian compound—hover near the door. Presently there is a little stir. A

gentleman advances and makes a sign to Lord Strathmere, who hastens down the aisle to the church door, where a carriage has just stopped. Lady Geraldine, followed by the Countess, steps out, takes her father's arm and walks slowly up the aisle amidst a hushed murmur of admiring excitement. She wears the regulation white satin and orange blossom, and the exquisite lace veil covering all is fastened with a large diamond star.

Very pale, very beautiful, perfectly collected, is the fair bride. She does not betray the least nervousness through the whole of the ceremony, and when it is ended, and she walks through the crowds of people, leaning on her husband's arm, with the strains of the "Wedding March" rolling through the church, she acknowledges the raised hats of the men by a slight bow and smile. Many a fair girl follows her with admiring, envious eyes. What more could earth hold for her? Young, rich, beautiful; married to a man of fashion, and an earl: surely she had all that heart could desire. Who would not envy her bright fate? Ah, who indeed!

The breakfast is over; the last health has been drunk, and Lady Geraldine rises to go and change her dress. In half an hour she and her husband will leave the house. They are going to spend the honeymoon in Yorkshire, where Lord Windholm has an estate. In her dressing-room Lady Geraldine finds her maid.

"Annette," she says, quietly, "go out and leave me quite alone for five minutes, then you may return. Do not allow anyone to disturb me—not even the Countess."

"Very well, my lady," replies the well-trained servant.

At the end of five minutes she returns, and sees Lady Geraldine lying in a heap by her davenport, which is open. For a moment Annette is paralysed with terror, but being a sensible girl, she does not rush out of the room and scream, but quietly raises the lifeless form. Her own face blanches when she sees a tiny stream of crimson on the rich satin dress. Has Lady Geraldine broken a blood-vessel? She chafes the cold hands, and applies strong scent to the marble forehead. With all her efforts it is quite five minutes before the eyes open and Lady Geraldine gives a shuddering sigh. "Thank Heaven!" ejaculates the girl devoutly. "Are you better, my lady?"

"Yes, what is it? Did I faint?" and the young lady tries to rise. Then, catching sight of the blood on her dress, she says, "Ah, I remember: I went to my desk for something, when I felt dizzy and fell."

"But the blood, my lady?"

"Yes. I ruptured a tiny vessel a few years ago, and if I am over excited or fatigued the blood comes from my mouth."

"You will not be able to go out," says the girl.

"Nonsense, Annette; you must dress me at once. But first I must

have some wine; I feel so weak. Go and get some, and mind you tell no one of this."

"But, my lady ——" the girl expostulates.

"Annette, I wish it. I ask you as a particular favour not to mention my faintness; I don't wish to alarm them unnecessarily. Fetch the wine and then come and dress me quickly."

Annette obeys unwillingly. When she returns the davenport is closed and Lady Geraldine divested of her dress. The wine and the exertion of a hurried toilette bring back a little life into the bride's white face. As she makes her adieux with calm, smiling ease, no one guesses how the sight of a withered flower has well-nigh robbed her of life.

"Good-bye, Annie," she says, trying not to see the tears in her friend's eyes. "I shall want you to come and stay with me by-and-by. Think of me sometimes, dear, and write to me when you have time."

III.

"Who dines with us this evening, Geraldine?" asks Lord Windholm, without raising his eyes from the paper he is reading. His wife is engaged with her letters, so the question has to be repeated.

"No one, for a wonder. Neither have I arranged to go anywhere. It is more than a month since we have had a thoroughly quiet evening, I feel sure."

"And very proper too. You know I object to 'quiet' evenings, and thoroughly dislike a tête-à-tête dinner. It was inconsiderate of you to arrange so badly."

"I don't know that I *arranged* it at all; it is more an oversight than anything else. Personally, I am rather glad, but I do not wish you to be victimised; you can dine at your club."

"Thank you, but I have no intention of doing so. I shall dine at home."

"Very well," answers Geraldine good-humouredly; "and if you will not be bored I will sing you some new songs I have."

To this Lord Windholm makes no reply, so Geraldine returns to her letters. These occupy her until breakfast is ended, and then she goes to prepare for her ride with Lord Windholm.

They ride together every day, and sometimes it is the only hour in the twenty-four Geraldine spends with her husband. He is very particular about this—whether from pride in his wife's horsemanship, or because it gratifies him to see the universal admiration her beauty creates, Geraldine does not seek to analyse: she is quite indifferent upon the point.

It is a beautiful June morning, bright and sunny, but not overpoweringly hot. The park is crowded with equestrians and pedestrians, and also a good sprinkling of carriages. The fair young Countess of Windholm is queen of the present season as she was of the last.

She is at her best on horseback. The exercise brings a wild-rose tint to her usually white face, and a brighter light to her eyes.

The graceful curves of her slight figure bear well the severe outline of a habit, while the plain round hat, guiltless of a veil, cannot in the least detract from the beauty of the high-bred, patrician face. The young Countess is thought cold and haughty by many, especially her own sex. Yet none can deny that her manner is pleasant and agreeable, and her conversation kind and affable. But she has no dear "bosom-friend" in whom to confide all her secrets. Pleasant to all her numerous acquaintances, she makes a friend of none, for which she is censured. But few care to neglect the Countess of Windholm. Her high birth and connections, her wealth, position, and popularity, make her a person to be sought after. Through bows and smiles the Earl and Countess return to Prince's Gate. Lady Windholm goes to her room and her husband to his club. Late in the afternoon the former drives alone, returning only in time to dress for dinner.

Dinner is over, and Lady Windholm sits in the drawing-room alone. She holds a book in her lap, but presently it falls to the floor—she is asleep. The clear, soft light falls on her upturned face as her head reclines on the satin cushion. There is very little difference to the Geraldine of a year ago, except that she is slighter, and there are weary little lines round the lovely mouth. In her sleep the pretty red lips quiver slightly. She sleeps quietly on. The great house is perfectly quiet, and the air of the room sleep-inducing with the redolence of japonica and white roses.

With a start Lady Windholm awakes presently, smiling to think in what an unusual way she has passed a couple of hours. She wonders where her husband is. Had he come in while she was asleep, and left without disturbing her? "Scarcely," thinks Geraldine, as she seats herself at the piano.

After playing one or two things in a dreamy, sleepy way, she rises and goes to the dining-room. It is empty. She is about to return, feeling sure her husband has gone out, when she remembers he may be in the smoking-room. Thither she goes, her silk train making a slight rustle as it trails along the broad passages. Her hand is almost on the door, when it is opened from the inside, and her husband's valet appears, with a red, embarrassed face. He tries to ignore Lady Geraldine's intention of entering the room by attempting to close the door after coming out, but the lady's soft voice arrests him.

"Stay, Parsons, I am going in. Is Lord Windholm there?"

"Yes, my lady," answers the man with hesitation; "but—he—is not very well. I think, my lady, you might disturb him by going in."

"Allow me to pass," is all Lady Geraldine says, and Parsons draws back immediately.

The Earl of Windholm is lying full-length on a lounge, his face pale and his eyes bloodshot. He mutters incoherently as his wife enters,

and then closes his eyes and falls asleep immediately. No need to ask the nature of his lordship's illness. Geraldine has known all along of the unhappy vice to which her husband gives way, but it is the first time she has *seen* him under its influence. With a white, haggard face she quits the room; and the sight has done more than shock her.

IV.

One morning towards the middle of July the postman calls at Bramble Cottage and leaves a letter for Miss Parkhurst, who is seated in the pretty little morning-room at work. Under Annie's reign the house and its inmates have improved, both being for more orderly than in the old days. The Major is on the verandah, absorbed in his paper, and Annie is feeling a little lonely now that Marion is married, and the boys are all away. She takes the letter handed to her, and opens it eagerly on discovering it to be from Lady Windholm. It runs as follows—

"My dear Annie,—I am ashamed to think how long it is since I received your last kind letter. I must tender my usual apology for not writing before—press of engagements. But in truth this has been a very busy season, and I have scarcely had a moment to myself. However, it will soon be over. More than half the people have left town, and we too are going on the 24th. We give a dinner-party on the 21st, which prevents our leaving earlier. Now, dear, I want you to give my kind regards to Major Parkhurst and ask him to spare you for a few weeks. I should like you to come at once, if possible, so that you will have a few days in town before we leave for Yorkshire. I hope you will not disappoint me, for I shall not have another chance of seeing you for a long time, as I am ordered to winter abroad. I am tired and jaded, dear, but the sight of your fresh, bright face will, I feel sure, revive me.

"Ever yours affectionately,
"Geraldine Windholm."

"Do you think you can spare me, papa?" asks Annie eagerly.

"Certainly, my dear," replies the old gentleman. "I shall be glad for you to have a change. Go as soon as you like."

Thus it is settled, and in two days the little country-girl is with her aristocratic friend.

Lady Windholm is very pleased to have her, and talks more to Miss Parkhurst in an hour than she does to most of her lady friends in a week. About herself she says nothing, but Annie is not blind, and reads aright the beautiful, weary face. She sees what a bitter mistake life has proved to this fair girl. She sees the lovely face redden and pale whenever Lord Windholm's unsteady step is heard. She knows the constraint Geraldine puts upon herself at times, and her heart is full of pity for her friend.

"If you please, ma'am, my lady says will you kindly come to her room when you are dressed?"

Annie replying in the affirmative, the maid closes the door.

It is the evening of the 21st, and Miss Parkhurst is dressing for dinner, assisted by the housekeeper's little maid, who is very deft and handy. She gives a satisfied glance at herself as she rises to seek Geraldine. She wears a dress Lady Windholm ordered from her own dressmaker, a delicate silk trimmed with pale blue. Annie has never yet had any dress so rich and elegant, and she hardly knows herself.

She finds the young Countess alone, and somehow looking more beautiful than she has ever seen her look before. Her dress, composed entirely of black lace, shows to advantage the dazzling fairness of her skin. The bodice is cut with a small square, and the sleeves reach to the elbow, for Lady Geraldine is getting very thin. Only this evening her maid has been regretting the fact. Round the white throat is fastened a pendant necklet of superb rubies, which glisten and flash with every movement.

"Annie, I want to give you this row of pearls. Do you like it?" and Lady Windholm hands it to her.

"Oh, how lovely! Geraldine, how can I ever thank you for such a present? or, indeed, how can I accept anything so costly?"

"Nonsense, child; there are no thanks required. The pearls will look well on your pretty round neck, and I shall like to know you have them. I have never worn them since the time I stayed with you, years ago. Now let us go down. Mr. Chillingham will take you in to dinner, remember. Why, Annie, is that a blush? Well, I would rather see you blush for him than for any man I know. He is not particularly rich, but he is good and noble. I fancied somehow Mr. Chillingham would not find fault with my choice of a lady for him to escort. He scarcely left your side all yesterday."

The party gathered at Prince's Gate this evening is rather large, and the Earl and Countess of Strathmere are among the guests. Lady Strathmere is quite satisfied with her daughter. She smiles inwardly to think what a perfect hostess she makes, so merry and thoughtful, and withal as stately as a young queen. A few minutes before dinner is announced Geraldine leaves the room in compliance with a message from her husband, who is in his dressing-room.

"I have a racking headache," is his greeting. "Can't you give me some salts or something?"

"When did it come on?" asks Lady Geraldine.

"This afternoon. I met Carew and he told me something that ather put me out, that is the reason."

"Have you tried any remedy?"

"A little brandy," says the Earl.

Geraldine knows it. Her husband's habit is fast becoming stronger than his sense of decency. Here are twenty people in the house waiting for dinner, and the host in a state quite unfit to receive them.

"You had better lie down," she says, calmly, "and I will send Parsons with some soda-water and my salts. Perhaps you will be able to appear at dessert." And she quits the room to make an apology for the host's non-appearance.

But Lord Windholm is an obstinate man. Just as the butler announces dinner he comes into the room, and, saying he feels considerably better, offers his arm to the Duchess of Braemuir, while the other gentlemen seek their partners also.

Annie, who is seated where she can plainly see Lady Windholm, notices that her face is brightly flushed, and her eyes are sparkling like stars. But she is very lively, and during the whole dinner keeps up an animated flow of conversation. Annie is fascinated, and yet she cannot think what makes her long to see Geraldine burst into tears. At last the young Countess rises. Instead of moving to the door, which young Chillingham hastens to open, she stands perfectly still, her face becoming white as marble. All eyes are fixed on her. The rubies rise and fall with her quick breathing, and then she falls, and the lace dress is covered with a tide of crimson. There is one mute second of breathless horror, and then she is gently raised and carried to a sofa. The blood is still flowing, and she is so motionless that they think she is dead.

But the doctor, coming in an incredibly short time, assures them that the Countess still lives, though her hours are numbered. Gently they carry her up stairs and lay her on the satin bed, from which she will never rise; the fair, lovely flower perishing ere it reaches maturity. The guests disperse, silent and awe-struck. It is dreadful to have death brought so near in an hour of pleasure, to have so grim a guest at a banquet.

The Earl of Windholm, with a white, frightened face, seeks the doctor.

"Is there any possibility of her living?" he asks anxiously.

"I grieve to say there is not the least hope of her ladyship's life," replies the doctor. "This is not the first time she has ruptured a blood-vessel, and her constitution has never been strong. Added to which, there is a great weakness of the heart. But I am at a loss to conjecture what brought on this violent hemorrhage. Has she been frightened or worried in any way?"

"I think not," the Earl answers. "But may I see her?"

"Certainly; but remember, Lord Windholm, that any excitement will shorten the few hours that remain to her."

Lord Strathmere is almost frantic. He sends for the most eminent physicians, but they all say the same. Nothing can be done for Lady Windholm; she is past help.

Lady Strathmere's cold face pales at the words. Might her daughter's fate have been different if her life had been happier? What is the use of wondering what might have been? One has to do with what is.

It is far into the night before Lady Windholm opens her eyes. Looking about and seeing the number around her bed, she whispers to the doctor, who is holding his fingers on her pulse, "Send them all away, I want to be alone." When her wish has been carried out she asks for Miss Parkhurst, who comes immediately. "Annie," she whispers, "are we quite alone?"

"Quite," answers Annie, bravely stifling her sobs.

"Then take off the locket that is round my neck. There is a tiny knob of gold at the bottom: press it." Annie does so, and reveals, not a portrait, as she expected, but a tiny spray of withered flowers.

"Annie," says the weak voice again, "bend lower. Will you take the locket and send it to Jack, and tell him with my dying breath I sent my love."

Annie starts and trembles, but promises to carry out Lady Windholm's wishes.

"Then kiss me, dear, and let the others come in; I am getting weaker every minute. Poor Jack!"

Those are her last words. She smiles at her father and mother, and at her husband, but cannot speak. They press near with restoratives, but the mute appeal of her eyes is not to be disregarded, and she is left in peace. Just before the breaking of dawn she heaves a long, deep sigh, which carries with it her last breath.

The beautiful Countess of Windholm is at rest. Her weary heart will never ache again.

Long years afterwards, when Annie is a staid matron with grown-up sons and daughters, a chance word from her youngest daughter, a girl with the aristocratic beauty of the Chillinghams stamped on her face, brings back the past with vivid distinctness.

"I mean to be rich and important, so I shall marry for position," she affirms with all the decision of seventeen.

"God forbid!" retorts the mother solemnly. "No marriage in any position can be happy that is not based solely on pure affection."

Suddenly before her comes the vision of a woman dying in the height of her youth and beauty; and a young man lying sick unto death in a far-off land, with nothing to console his last moments but a little locket containing a spray of withered flowers.

M. F.

AT A GERMAN SILVER WEDDING.

THERE is an open, breezy country in the north of Germany not unlike our own eastern counties: it has waving corn-fields and long sandy roads, and now and then you come upon close-lying villages, while every evening brings a sharp, fresh breeze, with a real smell of the sea in it, to rustle the wheat and stir up clouds of sand.

I spent a summer there, at a little village called Sebaldsbrück, and grew very familiar with the Sebaldsbrück people during those summer months. They had never had an English lady among them before, and at first they eyed me curiously, to see what strange things I might do or say. But very soon I became the best of friends with all the place; and I knew as much about their local concerns—how lame Hans longed to go into the army, and what Frau Heinock got for her pigs, and the miller's wife's disappointment that her new daughter-in-law would not lend a hand with the washing—as if I had been Sebaldsbrück born and bred.

So it came to pass that I went to the baker's silver wedding, which was a great festival in Sebaldsbrück, for both the baker and his wife came of families who had dwelt in the same place, holding the same fields and cottages, for many generations. No lord could think more highly of his long descent than Herr and Frau Bartles did of their roll of ancestry.

"I am from East Prussia," said Frau Bartles to me one day; and when I replied in astonishment, "Why, I thought you were a native of Sebaldsbrück, Frau Baker," she answered, with a magnificent wave of her hand: "I speak of my family, English miss, who came here from Königsberg in the year 1490. My man's forefathers settled here about the same date, from Thuringia. Ah, he is somewhat of a Southerner still!"

It was on this occasion that Frau Bartles told me of her approaching silver wedding; and her daughter Julie, who stood close behind me for the purpose, I well knew, of investigating the material and make of my polonaise, volunteered the information that no one was ever *invited* to an anniversary feast of this kind, but that all who wished to do honour to the occasion were expected to present themselves. The nods and smiles that passed between us at parting assured the baker's family that the "English miss" would not be behindhand in paying her respects on the appointed day.

It was a hot, sunny Sunday in July. All Sebaldsbrück was baking in that clear, white glare which, I think, only Germany knows. On ordinary Sundays the village would have been very quiet at three in the afternoon; for the good people get their churchgoing over very early, and the weekly dance at the "Black Bear" does not begin till

six o'clock, so that they can rest indoors during the great heat, and recruit between the two great excitements of the day.

But on this Sunday there was evidently something unusual astir. People clung like swarming bees about the doors of the baker's house, where swung the blue wooden sign, displaying the usual white coffee-pot and lavish assortment of fancy bread, painted with primitive notions of perspective, wreathed for the occasion with laurel and bay, as if the portly baker had just returned from a glorious military campaign. I noticed that the ladies of the party pushed bravely in at the narrow doorway, while the gentlemen lingered more shyly outside, whispering together, and nudging each other to enter first.

Everyone was in gala dress, and turned pleasant brown faces to greet me as I entered the baker's house, which is built, as are all the farmhouses of North Germany (for the baker had some land of his own to farm), in two parts—that is to say, a long brick-floored hall divides the living rooms, which open upon it on one side, from the stalls for horses and cows, which are ranged on the other. The chief work of the house is done in this big, open hall. The women wash their clothes, and the girls cook and iron at the stove in the corner, while the cows and the customers look on from opposite sides, for the shop, the parlour, and the sleeping rooms of the family all give on the hall. This arrangement affords rare opportunities for gossiping with all the old women who look in, ostensibly to fetch their daily loaves of black bread, a yard long, and as hard as a brickbat.

But on this occasion a long table occupies the centre of the hall, spread with all sorts of unusual delicacies. Six or eight brown smoked hams, and as many long blue-black sausages; piles of bread-and-butter and gingerbread; flat cakes sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar; square cakes full of raisins, or—a terrible danger to unwary teeth—fresh cherries, with an unnatural preponderance of stones, which have a knack of embedding themselves where they are least expected, in the soft corners of a wedge-shaped slice. The table was garnished with huge bouquets of flowers—asters, fuchsias, and lark-spur—which had been contributed by all the neighbours, and accounted for the generally cropped appearance of all the gardens in the village. A few young people were hovering round the feast, putting finishing touches, and Frau Bartles' married daughter, from the town, stood ready to preside at the coffee making, while her four-months baby, a wickel-kind (that is, a child strapped upon a pillow, as is still the fashion in primitive parts of Germany), hung by a loop of pink ribbon to a peg behind the parlour door.

In the parlour sat Herr and Frau Bartles in state upon the horse-hair sofa, and, to my confusion, insisted on my making a third with them on the seat of honour, and placed me between them. In vain I assured them that there must be older and more worthy guests; I was the stranger out of England, and therefore this slippery but honourable position was mine by rights, and into it I squeezed. Herr Bartles I

had never seen before out of his white apron and paper cap; to-day he was arrayed in shining black broadcloth and a resplendent blue necktie, which I was informed were his identical wedding garments twenty-five years before. I inferred from the constrained manner in which the worthy baker used his arms, and from the alternately unbuttoned buttons of his waistcoat, that he had been of a considerably slimmer figure when he first won the heart of the Frau Baker, who, in her wedding dress of black satin, looked like a comfortable pincushion. Her head was crowned with her original wreath of orange blossoms and silver-gilt leaves, and Julie stood close behind her to arrange this rather embarrassing ornament, which would go all on one side whenever the energetic bakeress jumped up to receive a guest. Julie had a reversionary interest in its preservation, I gathered, from the fire of small jokes which her solicitude provoked.

The table in front of our sofa was spread with a motley collection of little articles, many of them silver-gilt to suit the occasion, which had been presented to the bridal pair by the assembled guests. Fortunately I had provided myself with an ornamental workbox of fascinating manufacture, which was the very thing for a wedding present, combining the useful and the beautiful in a manner most attractive to German hearts.

After the first compliments had passed between my hosts and myself, the members of the company were severally introduced to me, and as there were already about thirty squeezed into the parlour, and the party increased every moment, this operation took a considerable time. Each new lady acquaintance had a question to ask me about England, or my family, whose details they soon mastered correctly; while the men grunted almost unintelligible remarks from behind their pipes, which I believe were observations and inquiries concerning the commercial and agricultural condition of my native land. Presently a movement on the outer edge of the little crowd round our sofa of honour announced that the arrangements in the hall were complete, and a rather undignified rush was made towards the long table, Herr and Frau Bartles alone proceeding arm in arm, in token of being, as Artemus Ward says, "very much married."

My hostess gave a great sigh of contentment as she looked down the whole length of the long table, and noted how well covered it appeared.

"We were up all night," she whispered, "baking and preparing—then at seven o'clock we dressed and went to church, and then the company began arriving so soon! I felt anxious for the table's appearance, for Julie is but a girl, and I had to leave all the decoration to her. Heaven be thanked, does it not look beautiful?"

The little woman was blushing and bridling with pleasure and excitement, and nodding encouragement to Julie, who, in a muslin polonaise wonderfully like my own, was dispensing big white china cups of coffee to the ladies, while the gentlemen helped themselves

to tall glasses of sweet, black beer, three-quarters deep in froth, which is the chief drink of all classes in Northern Germany.

And then the cakes! I excused myself from eating ham and sausage on the score of having dined so lately at the Schloss (at the fashionable hour of two o'clock: most Sebaldsbrück dinners were at half past eleven!), but the cakes I was not to be let off; and to this day I hardly like to think of the platefuls of butter-cake, cherry-cake, Redan-cake, which my curiosity and politeness together disposed of. Frau Bartles kept piling up my plate, and being terribly disappointed that I would not try her home-smoked ham, eaten raw, in thick brown slices, this was the only way that I could satisfy her hospitality. Luckily, German confectionery is very light. Of conversation there was but little, for most of the guests had walked long distances, and were more inclined to eat than to talk just yet. Besides, as my neighbour at table told me (a married sister of Frau Bartles, who hoped to hold her own silver wedding next year, and was consequently taking notice of everything), they would continue sitting round the table till nearly nine o'clock, when the fiddlers were ordered, and the "Grandfather" would open the ball.

"The grandfather?" I repeated, looking round to identify the old gentleman, but my neighbour laughed.

"'The Grandfather' is the German marriage-dance; have you not such a one in England? Oh, then, you must certainly see us dance it, presently; there will be forty couples or so, and it will be very imposing!"

"In that case," I answered, "if I am to see the 'Grandfather' in the evening, I must be gone now!" For a recollection of the old Countess, my hostess at the Schloss, awake after her nap and eager for an account of the gay doings in the village, reminded me that I must not linger longer.

"Make my compliments to the Herr and Frau Baker," I whispered, "and say, with their kind permission, I will return to see the dancing," and I slipped up from the table quietly, unwilling to disturb the party.

But I was not to escape thus. My hostess was after me in a moment, seizing a plate of cake from the table as she came; she was overwhelmed with concern at my leaving so early, and it was only when I spoke of the old Countess's feeble health and expectation of my return, that she would suffer me to go at all. She thrust the cakes upon me to eat on the way, "lest I should be hungry" (the distance from the village to the Schloss during which this dreaded fit of hunger might attack me being at most three-quarters of a mile), and called after me that she had ventured to send a Redan Kuchen to the gracious lady at the Schloss, which had preceded me by the hands of Jacob the Drottel (idiot), the only messenger to be found that day in Sebaldsbrück.

So at last I tore myself away, with promises to return again later

on, and assurances that if I found Jacob lingering on the road, or too inquisitively regarding the Redan Kuchen ("packed in three papers, I give you my word!" said Frau Bartles), I would give him a good shaking! However, for this there was no need; the poor fellow, a shambling, loose-made boy, of about seventeen, was trundling along the road obediently enough, with the cake on a tray on his shoulder, and only stopping every now and then to fling a pebble at the storks that were picking up their evening meal in the ditches alongside. Big storks and little storks, they are a queer, amusing sight. The young begin to leave the nest about the middle of June, and follow their sturdy old fathers to the ponds and marshy grounds where they find their most succulent food. Sometimes the parent stork stands in the midst of a little excited group of children, waving aloft in his bill a particularly desirable eft or blindworm, and then swallows it himself with a gulp which sadly disappoints all his expectant family.

But I am as bad as Jacob, lingering thus on the road, and must return to the silver wedding, of which I later saw a little more.

About nine o'clock the Countess allowed me to return to the village, accompanied by Julius, the Count's old servant, who had previously ascertained that the meal, at the beginning of which I had assisted, was at an end at last, and the dance of the "Grandfather" about to commence.

When I took my stand in a corner of the baker's big hall, from which the guests had cleared the long tables, I was the only person in the room unprovided with a partner, always excepting the wickel-kind, who still hung on the peg behind the door, staring at the scene with sleepy eyes. I with difficulty resisted the persuasions of Julie to join the dance. She even offered me her own betrothed as a partner, declaring that Johann would teach me, and she would take old Julius from the Schloss instead; but I spared Corporal Johann his disappointment by declaring that I should never be able to achieve a strange national dance without previous practice.

About forty couples were by this time formed in procession, and they marched slowly round the hall, headed by the baker and his wife, who sang, in a gruff and squeaky duet, the following couplet:

"When the grandfather first with the grandmother wed,
His hair was quite curly, his cheeks were quite red."

This was taken up in chorus by the company, and then, as it concluded, all the couples broke into a lively waltz, and danced, as all Germans, of whatever age or class, can, with great spirit for some minutes. Suddenly, the procession re-forming, the first pair sang something of this sort:

"The grandmother, too, who was only eighteen,
Was as pretty a maiden as ever was seen;"

and again the waltz succeeded.

This went on through an interminably long description of all the principal persons at the "Grandfather's" marriage, and the chief adventures of his wedded life. As these were not very interesting, and related chiefly to his joining the militia and finding his cow stolen on his return home, I found I had had enough of the "Grandfather" and his experiences of life after about an hour. So, taking advantage of a waltzing interval, I stole away into the quiet, sweet-smelling night, and hurried home to the castle, leaving Julius, my protector, pirouetting far too nimbly with the postmistress to give me a thought.

There was not even a stork abroad along the starlit road, but up at the Schloss terrace I could still plainly hear the continuation, not the conclusion, of the "Grandfather;" and Julius, who was very stiff and headachey next day, told me the dancing had been kept up, with refreshment between, until six in the morning, when most of the guests went straight off to work, carrying their gala clothes with them in bundles, from which they had produced their working dress. And so ended Frau Bartles' silver wedding, which was considered in Sebaldsbrück to be an unparalleled success, and I venture to hope its description may interest some English reader.

G. B. Stuart.

LIFE.

Was it not said by some great sage
That life is an unwritten page?
We write our fate, and when old age
Or death comes on,
We drop the pen.

For good or ill, from day to day,
Each deed we do, each word we say,
Makes its impress upon the clay
Which moulds the minds
Of other men.

And all our acts and words are seeds
Sown o'er the past, whence future deeds
Spring up, to form or wheat or weeds;
And as we've sown
So reap we then.

P. W.

WHY DID CHARLIE HARDUP GO TO ASCOT?

IF you had asked that question of the young gentleman himself, you would probably have received an evasive, not to say equivocal answer. He would most likely have expatiated on his predilection for the national sport, on the peculiarly interesting features of the meeting in question (of which, barring what few speculative conjectures he might have overheard at the club, he knew absolutely nothing), or on the social necessity of doing as other people did. But he would never have confessed that the sole object of his intended excursion was the very vague chance of exchanging a word or two with that most capricious of all coquettes, Blanche Anstruther, with whom he was hopelessly in love, and who had as much idea of marrying him as she had of volunteering to be shot from a cannon, like Miss Zazel.

Charlie Hardup, indeed, although of an excellent family (the Hardups are reported to date from the Saxon Heptarchy, and, according to present appearances, are not likely to become extinct), and a popular man enough in his own set, was not exactly what the fashionable world would call a desirable parti. His income, including a salary of a hundred and twenty pounds a year as clerk in the F. O., barely averaged the annual total of a "monkey;" while his expectations, beyond a possible legacy of a few additional hundreds from an old maiden aunt domiciled in an obscure village of Devonshire, were positively nil.

Master Charlie, however, was one of those sanguine, unreflecting youths who seldom allow prudential considerations to interfere with any pet project they may have formed; and who, in love matters especially, are apt to assume as a matter of course that the sentiments of their inamorata must necessarily be in accordance with their own. He might have married his cousin, who was devoted to him, and desired no better than to surrender her pretty self and ten thousand pounds in the Three per Cents. to his keeping; but even if the idea had ever entered his head, one of Miss Blanche's killing glances—and she was no mean adept in the language of the eye—would have sufficed at once to obliterate any impression which the less dazzling, though to most minds more attractive, loveliness of Jessie Stapleton might under other circumstances have made upon him.

His acquaintance with General Anstruther's daughter was of recent date, and had hitherto been limited to a tour de valse in a crowded ball-room, or, once or twice during the season, to the privilege—in the absence of any preferable escort—of handing her to her carriage. But even these brief opportunities had enabled the young lady to indulge her flirting propensities to their full extent, and to secure, by the

occasional sacrifice of a flower detached from her bouquet, a good-looking, though in other respects wholly unprofitable addition to the long list of her admirers.

Such transient glimpses of Paradise, however, were not enough for Charlie. A chance pressure of the hand, or a stereotyped smile of recognition in the "Row," were doubtless very soothing to his feelings, and made him happy for the rest of the day; but with all his ingenuity he had not as yet succeeded in finding a favourable moment for the disclosure of his love. Ascot, he thought, would be the place of all others for his intended purpose. He had heard from her own lips that she was to accompany her father thither, and it would be hard indeed if in the course of the day he could not manage to speak to her alone. It was no very difficult matter for him to procure the requisite "Open Sesame" to the royal enclosure; and having, by dint of a little persuasion, obtained from his chief the no less necessary permission to absent himself from the duties of his office, he arrived on the eventful morning at Waterloo, exactly as the train, bearing with it la dame de ses pensées and her party, steamed slowly from the station.

It may here be incidentally mentioned that one of the most important features of the Ascot meeting in the year to which our story relates was considered to be a match between the hitherto almost unbeaten Prince Georgie and Ramilies, a horse belonging to a popular French sportsman, M. Legrand. The result of this struggle being still fresh in the memory of all votaries of the turf, we need only refer the uninitiated who are particular about dates to that excellent manual the "Racing Calendar." As has been said, however, Charlie was far from sharing the keen anticipations of his fellow passengers as to the issue of this or any other item of the programme. His thoughts, occupied solely with one object, had nothing in common with their "tips" and fancies. And though he listened mechanically to the pro and con arguments of those around him, and strove politely to feign an interest in their conflicting opinions, it may safely be asserted that at the end of his journey he was not—as regarded the subject of their discussions—one atom the wiser.

When he had reached his destination, breasted the hill, and entered the enclosure, the first race had already been run. The lawn, thronged with a more than usually numerous assemblage of pretty women, resplendent in the gayest and most becoming toilettes, formed a picture which certainly merited a more admiring appreciation than that bestowed on it by the new comer. With an air of ill-concealed impatience he made his way among the different groups, rapidly scrutinising each face as he passed, until, at the extreme corner near the railing, he suddenly beheld her of whom he was in search. Not, as he had hoped, alone, but engaged in earnest conversation with a young man standing beside her; and, to judge from the familiarity of his manner, evidently on intimate terms with his fair

companion. While Charlie, undecided whether to advance or retreat, paused irresolute, Blanche looked up, and their eyes met. Acknowledging his salutation with the coolest possible nod, she turned her head away, and, taking the young man's arm, strolled leisurely towards the stand, leaving our hero utterly dumbfoundered by this unexpected rebuff. He was still, like Sir Christopher in the "Critic," in amazement lost, when he heard himself addressed by his name, and, glancing round, recognised in the speaker that most indefatigable of all tittle-tattle mongers, Tommy Partington.

"A decided case of spoons," said that worthy, pointing to the retreating couple with a significant grin. "Well, she has landed her fish this time, and played her cards to some purpose at last. It isn't every day that a girl in her third—no, fourth season, by Jove!—manages to give the young ones the go-by so cleverly. There's the advantage of a waiting game, you see."

"What do you mean?" inquired Hardup, rather bewildered than enlightened by the other's loquacity. "Of whom are you talking?"

"Of whom?" echoed Tommy, in a tone of unaffected astonishment; "of our love birds yonder, of course. Is it possible you don't know that he proposed to her two days ago, and that she will be Lady Plinlimmon before Goodwood?"

"She! Blanche Anstruther?"

"Ah, you may well look surprised," continued the little man. "I was, I can tell you, when I heard it. Thirty thousand a-year, the house in Grosvenor Square, and Snowdon Castle; not a bad exchange from the General's poky hole in Mayfair, where the dining-room is hardly as big as a full-sized billiard table! Now, my opinion is that when people give dinners—why, what on earth is the fellow up to?" exclaimed Tommy, interrupting himself, and staring with all his might at his quondam listener, who, brushing cavalierly by old Lady A., at that moment absorbed in the intricate mysteries of her betting-book, was in the act of passing through the gate opening on the course. "Ah, I remember now; he was always dangling after her, and the news has upset him. What idiots some men are, to be sure!"

Having thus relieved his mind by this consolatory reflection, Mr. Partington turned his thoughts to business, and proceeded, though not without a certain inward misgiving (for he was a cautious speculator), to invest a modest "pony" on the redoubtable Prince Georgie.

Meanwhile, the object of this friendly criticism, regardless that the horses engaged in the next race were commencing their preparatory canter, strode unconcernedly across the course, and had nearly reached the opposite side, when he caught sight of an old gentleman a few paces in advance of him, who in another instant would have been inevitably capsized by a headstrong chestnut, whose jockey appeared utterly unable to hold him. With one bound forward, Charlie, in his day a "'Varsity" athlete, and as muscular as Geoffrey

Delamere, grasped the tottering stranger under both arms, and lifting him gently over the railing, placed him in safety out of the reach of the crowd. Without waiting for thanks, he hurried away in the direction of a tent bearing the colours of the Rifle Brigade.

"Who is he?" eagerly inquired the old man, when he had recovered his breath, of an acquaintance who from the box-seat of a drag had been a witness of the whole scene. "What is his name? Do you know him?"

"Charlie Hardup," was the other's reply. "A clerk in the F.O., and as poor as a rat, but a deuced plucky fellow for all that. By Jove, Sir Robert, it was a near touch; I sha'n't forget it in a hurry."

"Nor shall I," said his companion, emphatically. "Get me a glass of sherry somewhere, Middleton; this sudden shock has quite unnerved me!"

Long before Sir Robert Wyndham had entirely regained his equanimity, the appearance of his preserver—for so he might really be called—in the tent of the Rifle Brigade had been hailed by the acclamations of some half-dozen officers of that gallant regiment, then employed in superintending the preparations for a substantial luncheon, of which, later in the day, a chosen few of their particular friends were expected to partake. Most of those present were more or less intimate with him, partly owing to the gregarious habits of London society, and partly to the circumstance of more than one of them being members of clubs to which he himself belonged. Great, therefore, was their surprise when, instead of exhibiting his usual vivacity, he stalked in with a moody and dejected air, and replying curtly to the greetings showered on him from all sides, seated himself wearily on a bench, and filling a tumbler with champagne, emptied it at a draught.

"Why, Charlie," cried the enfant gâté of the brigade, Bertie Lascelles, familiarly called "Pickles," "what's up, or rather what's down? Have they cleaned you out already, or isn't Miss Barkis willing? There, you needn't look so savage; tell us what's the matter, and we'll see what pips are on the cards, and what's the state of the game."

"Nothing's the matter," growled Charlie, drumming his fingers on the table, "only I'm not in a humour for chaff."

"Never was more serious in my life," retorted the incorrigible Bertie. "Out with it, old man, and we'll pull you through in no time."

"Shut up, Pickles," good-naturedly interposed one of the senior lieutenants; "Charlie'll be all right by-and-by, when he has something on the match to set him going. Who'll take four to one against the Prince? Don't all speak at once."

"Not likely," sneered Harry Purvis, the youngest of the party. "It's a moral."

"I'll lay five," said Dacre, better known by the sobriquet of "Crœsus." "Five to one in hundreds against Ramilies."

"There's a chance for you, Charlie," shouted Pickles. "A most desirable investment for an enterprising capitalist. Shall he book it?"

"Book what?" lazily asked Hardup, who, buried in his own reflections, had not heard a word of what was going on.

"A 'monkey' to a hundred against Ramilies," gravely repeated Crœsus. "Is it a bet?"

"I don't care. Yes, if you like," replied Charlie, hardly conscious of what he was saying.

"Very good," said Captain Dacre, methodically noting the wager in his betting-book, while the backer of M. Legrand's horse, rising languidly from his seat, nodded carelessly to his entertainers, and left the tent.

He did not, however, return to the enclosure, but taking a ticket for the grand-stand, edged his way through the pushing and jostling multitude on the slope until he found himself, he scarcely knew how, in the midst of the "ring." There all was animation and excitement. The bell for saddling had rung a minute or two before, and cries of "I'll take odds" resounded with deafening monotony in every possible inflexion of the human voice. Presently a movement of the crowd towards the railings announced that the two competitors—for the long-talked-of match was now to be decided—were on their way to the starting post; and after a few moments of breathless expectation, the pair were seen breasting the hill, one slightly in advance of the other, and increasing the distance between them at every stride.

From that point the race was virtually over, and from the exulting roar of the bookmakers and the blank faces of the disappointed backers, Charlie, who had been completely shut out from a view of the struggle, learnt that the favourite had been beaten, and that he himself was thereby a gainer to the tune of five hundred pounds.

This unhoped for windfall, although it did not altogether console him for the morning's mischance, nevertheless tended materially to raise his spirits; and, while returning to town by an early train, he began to reflect that he might possibly have acted more wisely in placing his affections in a quarter where he instinctively felt they would not have been unwelcome.

Was it too late to repair the error? He pondered over the matter that evening at his club, and for many subsequent evenings; and on a certain afternoon, having apparently made up his mind on the subject, proceeded in a hansom to a house in Tyburnia, where Miss Jessie Stapleton and her aunt were then residing. What passed between them may be guessed from a conversation which took place some six months later at a breakfast-table in Arlington Street, at the head of which Madame was engaged in skimming the fashionable intelligence in the *Morning Post*, while Monsieur, who had just mastered the contents of a letter, was staring at it with a strangely bewildered air.

"What is it, Charlie?" inquired the former, laying down her paper. "Good or bad news?"

"Too good to be true, Jessie," replied the individual addressed. "Read it yourself, and see if you can make anything of it. I can't."

"It seems clear enough, and oh! how nice if it were only true," said his wife, after an attentive perusal of the epistle, which ran as follows:—

"Lincoln's Inn Fields, December 4th, 187—.

"DEAR SIR,—We have the pleasure of informing you that by the will of our late client, Sir Robert Wyndham, Baronet, a sum of ten thousand pounds, at present invested in Consols, has been bequeathed to you absolutely, and we shall be happy to furnish you with all necessary particulars at any hour you may please to appoint.

"We are, dear Sir, faithfully yours,

"Charles Hardup, Esq." "SHARPE AND PARKINSON.

"Must be a mistake," said Charlie, looking more puzzled than ever. "Who on earth is, or rather was, Sir Robert Wyndham? Never heard the name in my life! However," he added, "I'll have it out with the lawyer before I go to the office, and if there should be anything in it—don't be too sanguine, Jessie—but if there *should* ——"

"We shall be richer than we were yesterday," was Jessie's reply. "We can't well be happier, can we, Charlie?"

It will probably have been anticipated that our hero's claim to the above legacy was duly confirmed by the legal adviser of the late Baronet, who, moreover, explained the motive of the gift by recalling to his visitor's memory a circumstance he had totally forgotten, namely, the timely succour rendered by him to the deceased at Ascot, which Sir Robert always persistently affirmed had saved his life. When the news was communicated to Mrs. Hardup (in the first instance by telegram, and afterwards with greater detail by her husband), it is presumable that she thought less of the testator's liberality, than of the risk incurred by his preserver, for she declared that in future Charlie should never set foot on a race-course without her. "Not on Lady Plinlimmon's account," she whispered slily in his ear. "I am not jealous of her *now*—poor woman, the *Post* says her case comes on next week in the Divorce Court. On the contrary, all things considered, I think it was just as well for both of us that you *did* go to Ascot, Charlie. Qu'en dis-tu?"

CHARLES HERVEY.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1881.

COURT NETHERLEIGH.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXII.

A DISAGREEABLE EXPEDITION.

IT was Monday morning. Charles Cleveland sat on his iron bedstead, in his dreary cell in Newgate: of which cell he had become heartily tired by this time: chewing there in solitude the cud of his reflections, which came crowding one upon another. None of them were agreeable, as may be imagined, but pressing itself upon him more keenly than all, was the sensation of deep, dark disappointment. Above the discomfort of his present position, above the sense of shame endured, above the dread of the hard, degrading life that loomed for him in the future, he felt the neglect of Lady Adela. She, for whom he was bearing all the misery and disgrace in this dreadful dungeon, had never, by letter or by message, sought to convey a ray of sympathy to cheer him. The neglect, the indifference, may have been unavoidable, but it told not the less bitterly on the spirit of the prisoner.

A noise at his cell door. The heavy key was turning in the lock, and the prisoner looked up eagerly—a visit was such a break in his dreary day. Two ladies were entering, and his heart beat wildly—wildly; for in the form of one he discerned some resemblance to Lady Adela's. *Had* she come to see him! and he had been so ungratefully blaming her! But the lady raised her veil, and he was recalled to his sober senses. It was only Grace Chenevix.

"So, Charles, an awful scrape you have brought yourself into, through your flirting nonsense with Adela!" began the Countess of Acorn, as she followed her daughter in.

"Now, mamma, dear mamma," implored Grace, in a whisper, "if you interfere, you will ruin all."

"Ruin all! much obliged to you, Grace! I think he has ruined himself," retorted the Countess, in a shrill tone. Never famous for a

sweet temper or a silent tongue, Lady Acorn was not improved by the trouble that had fallen on them, or by this distasteful expedition which she had been, so to say, forced to make this morning, for she could not allow Grace to come alone. The unhappy prisoner would reap the full benefit of her acrimony.

"I wonder you can look us in the face," she went on to him. "Had anyone told me I should sometime walk through Newgate attended by turnkeys, I should have said it was a libel. We came down in a hack cab. I'd not have brought the servants here for the world."

"I shall ever feel grateful to you," breathed Charles.

"Oh, never mind about gratitude," unceremoniously interrupted Lady Acorn; "there's no time for it. Let us say what we have to say, Grace, and be gone. I am all in a tremor, lest those men with keys should come and lock me up. Of course, Charles, you know it has all come out."

Charles looked up sharply.

"Which is more luck than you could have expected," added the Countess, while Grace sat on thorns, lest some unlucky admission of her mother's should ruin all, as she had just phrased it, and unable to get a word in edgeways. "Of all brainless simpletons you are the worst. If Adela chose (like the thoughtless, wicked girl she is, though she is my daughter) to write her husband's name to a cheque, was that any reason why you should go hotheaded to work, and make believe you did it? Mr. Grubb is not your husband, and you have no right to his money. Things that the law will permit a wife to do with impunity, you might be run up to the drop for."

"Who has been saying this?" breathed the prisoner, bewildered with the torrent of words and their signification. "Surely not Lady Adela."

"Charles," interposed Grace, and her quiet tones, after those of the Countess, sounded like the lulling of a storm, "there is no necessity for further mystery, or for your continuing to assume the guilt; which, as my mother says, was an unwise step on your part ——"

"I did not say unwise," sharply interrupted the Countess; "call things by their right names, Lady Grace. It was insanity, and nobody but an idiot would have done it. That's what I said."

"The circumstances are known to us now," went on Grace, speaking quietly. "Poor Adela, at her wits' end for money, drew the cheque, and sent you to cash it. And then, terrified at what she had done, persuaded you to assume the responsibility."

"She did not persuade me," explained Charles, falling completely into the snare, and believing every word that was spoken, yet still anxious to excuse Lady Adela. "I volunteered to bear it. And I would do as much again."

"Charles—mamma, pray let me speak for a minute—had you been

present when Adela wrote the cheque, you would be doubly to blame. She ——"

Charles shook his head. "I was not present."

"She, poor thing, was excited at the moment, and incapable of reflection, but you ought to have recalled her to reason, and refused to aid in it—for her own sake."

"And of course I should," eagerly answered Mr. Charles, "had I known there was anything wrong about it. She brought me the cheque ready filled in ——"

"When you went up from the City for the cheque-book, on the Saturday morning. Yes, we know all that."

"I declare I thought it was Mr. Grubb's writing, if ever I saw his writing in my life. I was not likely to have any other thought—how could I have? And I never recalled the matter to my mind, or knew anything more about it, till the Monday night, when I came up from Netherleigh, as I suppose Lady Adela has told you, if she has told you the rest."

"And then you undertook to shield her," interposed Lady Acorn, "and a glorious mess you have made of it between you. Grace, how you worry! you can speak when I have done. What *she* did would have been hushed up by her husband for all our sakes, but what you did was a very different matter. And the disgrace you have gratuitously brought upon yourself may yet be blazoned forth to every corner of the United Kingdom."

"And these are all the thanks I get," remarked Charles, striving to speak lightly.

"What other thanks would you like?" retorted the Countess. "A service of plate presented to you? You deserve a testimonial, don't you, to have run your head into a noose of this dangerous kind for any woman! And for Adela, of all others, who cares for nobody on earth but her blessed self. Not she."

"My mother is right," said Lady Grace, "and it may be as well, Charles, that you should know it. Adela has never cared for you in any way, save as an amusing boy, who could talk nonsense to her when she chose to condescend to listen. If you have thought anything else ——"

"I never had a disloyal thought to Lady Adela," interrupted Charles, warmly. "Or to her husband—who has always been so kind to me. I would have warded all such—all ill—from her with my life."

"And nicely she has repaid you!" commented Lady Acorn. "Do you suppose she would have confessed this herself?—No; we found it out. She would have let you suffer, and never said 'Thank you.' *I* tell you this, Master Charley; and I hope you will let it prove to you what the smiles of a heartless butterfly of a married woman are worth."

He bit his dry and fevered lips with mortification—fevered for *her*. And Lady Acorn, after bestowing a few more unpalatable truths upon

the unhappy prisoner, took her daughter's arm and hurried away, glad to escape from the place and the interview.

"A capital success we have had, Gracie," she cried, when they got outside the stone walls, "but it's all thanks to me. You would have beat about the bush, and palavered, and hesitated, and done no good. I got it out of him nicely—like the green sea-gull that the boy is. But, Grace, my child"—and Lady Acorn's voice for once grew hushed and solemn—"what in the world will be done with Adela?"

It was a painful scene, that in which they brought it home to Lady Adela. When Lady Acorn carried to her husband the news of Charles's unconscious avowal, he was struck almost dumb with consternation. The worst conclusion he had come to, in regard to some of the notes being traced to his daughter, was, that she had but borrowed money from Charles Cleveland. Innocently. Yes; he could not and would not think she had any knowledge of how Charles became possessed of the money. Lord Acorn, in spite of his perpetual embarrassments, and his not altogether straightforward shifts to evade them, possessed the true sense of honour that generally pertains to his order. He possessed it especially in regard to woman; and to find that his most favoured and favourite daughter had been guilty of theft; of—of—he could not pursue the thought, he sank down with his pain.

"We had better go to her, and hear what she has to plead in excuse, and—and—ascertain how far her peculations have gone," he said presently to his wife. "Perhaps there are more of them. Poor Grubb!"

So they went to Grosvenor Square, arm-in-arm, but sick at heart, and found Lady Adela alone. She was toying with a golden bird in a golden cage; gold at any rate in colour; a recent purchase. Her afternoon dress of muslin had golden-hued sprigs upon it, and there was much gilding of mirrors and other ornaments in the room, the taste of that day. A gay scene altogether, and Adela the gayest and prettiest object in it.

She was not quite as heartless, though, as appeared on the surface, or as Lady Acorn judged her to be. Adela was growing frightened. She was beginning to realise what it was she had done, and to wonder, in much self-torment, what would come of it. That Mr. Grubb would release Charles Cleveland she had not at first entertained the smallest doubt, or that the affair would be entirely hushed up. Charles would be true to her, never disclose her name, and there it would end. With this fond expectation she had buoyed herself up; but as the days went on, and Charles was still kept in Newgate, soon to be brought up for another examination preparatory to committal for trial, she grew alarmed. For the past day or two her uneasiness had been intolerable. Could she have saved Charles

and his good name by confessing the truth, and run away for ever from the sight of men, she would have done it thankfully; but to take the guilt upon herself, and such debasing guilt, *and* remain before the world!—this was utterly repugnant, not to say impossible, to the proud heart of Lady Adela.

It was so unusual to see her father and mother come in together, and to see them both with solemn faces, that Adela's heart leaped, as the saying runs, into her mouth. Still, it *might* not portend any adverse meaning, and she rallied her courage.

"I want to make him sing," she cried, turning on them her bright and smiling face. "Did you ever see so beautiful a colour, papa? I *hope* he is not too beautiful to sing."

But there was no answering smile on the faces of either father or mother, only an increased solemnity. Lord Acorn, waving his hand towards the bird as if he would wave off a too frivolous toy, touched her arm and pointed to a chair.

"Sit down, Adela."

She turned as white as death. Lady Acorn opened her lips to begin, a great wrath evidently upon them, but her lord and master imperatively waved his hand to her for silence, as he had just waved away the frivolous bird, and addressed his daughter.

"What is to become of you, Adela?"

She neither spoke nor moved. She sat back in the arm-chair, with her white and terror-stricken face. Her teeth began to chatter.

"How came you to do it?" he continued.

"To—to—do what?" she gasped.

"To do what!" screamed out Lady Acorn, utterly unable to control her tongue and her reproaches longer—"why, to rifle your husband's cheque-book of a cheque, and fill it in, and forge the firm's signature, and despatch that unsuspicious baby, Charles Cleveland, to cash it."

"Who—who says I did that?" asked Adela, making one last, hopeless, desperate effort to defend herself.

"Who ——"

"Betsy, if you can't let me speak, you had better go away for a few minutes," cried Lord Acorn, arresting a fresh burst of eloquence from his wife. "That you did do this thing, Adela, is known now; some of the notes have been traced to you, all the particulars have been traced, and Charles Cleveland has confessed to them. Any denial you could attempt would be more idle than the chirping of that bird."

"Charles has confessed to them?" she whispered, taken aback by this blow. Nothing, save his confession, could have brought it absolutely home to her.

"Did you set up a fantastic hope that he would keep silence to the end, and go to his hanging to save you?" demanded Lady Acorn, defying her lord's wish to have the whole ball to himself. "Proofs

came out against you, Madame Adela, as your father says; they were carried to Charles Cleveland, and he could but admit the truth."

"*Why* did you do this terrible thing?—That my daughter, whom I have so loved, should be capable of sullying herself with such disgrace!" broke off Lord Acorn, with a wail. In good truth, it had been a blow to him, and one he had never bargained for. To play a little at Lady Sanely's for amusement, was one thing; he had, so to say, winked at that; but to *gamble* and to steal money to pay her gambling debts, was quite another. "Adela, I could almost wish I had died before hearing of it."

Adela burst into tears. "I wanted the money so badly," she sobbed, hiding her face with her trembling hands. "I owed it—a great deal—to people at Lady Sanely's. I was at my wits' end, and Mr. Grubb would not give me any more. Oh, papa, forgive me! Can't it be hushed up?"

"Did you help yourself to more than that?" asked Lord Acorn.

"I do not understand," she faltered, not catching his meaning.

"Have you drawn or used any other false cheque?"

"Oh, no, no; only that. Papa, *won't* you forgive me?"

He shook his head. No, he felt that he could not. "My forgiveness may not be of vital consequence to you, one way or the other, Adela," he remarked with a groan, that he drowned by coughing. "The termination of this affair does not lie with me."

"It lies with my husband," she said, in a low tone. "He will hush it up."

"It does not lie with him, Adela," sternly spoke Lord Acorn. "Had it been one of his private cheques, had you used his name only, it might in a great degree have rested with him—unless the bankers had taken it up."

"But you borrowed old Mr. Howard's name as well," struck in Lady Acorn; "and, if he pleases to be stern and obstinate, he can just place you where Charles Cleveland is, and you would have to stand your trial in the face and eyes of the world. A pretty disgrace for us all! A frightful calamity."

Adela looked from one to the other, her face changing pitiably; now white as snow with fear, now hectic with emotion and shame.

"Mr. Grubb has full power in Leadenhall Street," she pleaded. "He will take care to shield *me*."

"Are you sure of that?" quietly asked her father. "Has your conduct to him been such—I don't allude to this one pitiable instance, I speak of your treatment of him generally—has it been such that you can assume he will inevitably go out of his way to shield you, right or wrong?"

In spite of the miserable shame that filled her, a passing flush of triumph crossed her face. Ay! and her heart. What though she *had* persistently done her best to estrange her husband, with her provoking ways and her scornful contumely, very conscious felt she that she was all

in all to him still. Why, had he not begged of her to confide this thing to him, and he would make it straight and guard her from exposure?

"I have nothing to fear from him, papa. I know it. It will be all right."

"How can you assert this in barefaced confidence, you wicked child!" groaned Lady Acorn. "I'd not—no, I'd not be so brazen for the world."

"Adela, don't deceive yourself with vain expectations; it may be harder for you in the end," interposed her father, once more making a deprecatory motion towards the place where his wife's tongue lay. "You are assuming a surety which you have no right to feel; better look the truth sternly in the face."

"I am his wife, papa," she faintly urged. "He will be *sure* to shelter me."

"He may be able to shelter you from exposure; I doubt not but that he will do it, so far as he can, for his own sake as well as for yours; for all our sakes, indeed. But ——"

"A few years ago you might have been hanged," struck in Lady Acorn. "Hanged outside Newgate. I can remember the time when death was the penalty for forgery. Dr. Dodd was hung for it. How would you have liked that?"

Adela did not say how she would have liked it. She was passing her hands nervously across her face, as if to keep down its pallor. As to Lord Acorn, he despaired of being allowed to finish any argument he might begin, and paced the room restlessly.

"But, though your husband may shield you from public exposure, it is too much to hope that he will absolve you from consequences, and I think you will have to face and bear them," recommenced Lord Acorn, talking while he walked. "Had my wife served me as you have served Grubb, I should have put her away from me for ever; and I tell it you, Adela, before her as she stands there, though she is your mother."

"And served me right, too," commented Lady Acorn.

"How do you mean, papa?" gasped Adela.

"My meaning ought to be plain enough," was Lord Acorn's angry reproof. "Are you wilfully shutting your eyes to the nature of the offence you have sullied yourself with?—its degradation?—its sin?" he sharply questioned. "There's hardly a worse in our criminal code, that I know of, except murder."

"But I do not understand," she faintly reiterated. "If my husband absolves me, who else ——"

"He may absolve you so far as the general public goes, shield you from that penalty," was the impatient interruption; "but not from your offence to himself. In my judgment you must not look for that."

Adela did not answer. She glanced at her father questioningly, with an imploring look.

"A man has put his wife away from him for a much less cause than this," continued Lord Acorn. "And your husband, I fancy, must have been already pretty nigh tired out. What has your conduct been to him, Adela, ever since your marriage?"

She bent her head, her face flushing. To be taken to task by her father was a bitter pill, in addition to all the other discomfort.

"*It has been shameful!*" emphatically pronounced Lord Acorn. "For my part, I marvel that Grubb has borne it. But that I make it a rule not to interfere with my daughters, once they have left my roof for that of a husband, I should not have borne it tamely for him; and that I now tell you, Adela. One or two hints that I have given you from time to time you have disregarded."

"He has borne with her and indulged her to the top of her bent, when he ought to have taken her by the shoulders and shaken her insolence out of her," nodded the mother.

"Had you been a loving wife, Adela, things might have a better chance of going well with you," pursued her father, with another motion of the hand. "But, remembering what your treatment of your husband has persistently been, you can have no plea for praying leniency of him now, or he much inclination to accord it."

Lady Adela would have liked to give her head a saucy toss. She knew better: her father could not judge of her husband as she could. "Francis can't beat me," she thought. "He can lecture me, and *will;* and I must bear it meekly for once, under the circumstances."

She looked up at her father.

"My husband is very fond of me, in spite of all," she whispered.

"Yes, he is fond of you," returned Lord Acorn, with emotion. "Too fond. His behaviour to you proves that. Why, how much money have you had of him, drawn from him by your wiles, beyond your large legitimate allowance?"

Adela did not answer. "Has he spoken of it?" she asked, the question occurring to her.

"No, he has not spoken of it; he is not the man to speak of it. I gather so much from your sisters: they talk of it amid themselves. One might have thought that your husband's generous kindness to you would have won your regard, had nothing else done it. It strikes me all that will be over now," concluded Lord Acorn.

Adela answered by a sobbing sigh.

"You have been on the wrong tack for some time now," he resumed, as an afterthought. "Who but a silly-minded woman would have made herself ridiculous, as you have, by flirting with a boy like Charles Cleveland? Do ——"

"Oh, papa! You cannot think for a moment I meant anything!" she exclaimed, her cheeks flushing hotly.

"Except to vex your husband. Do you think your foolishness—I could call it by a harsher name—did not give sorrow to myself and

your mother? We had deemed you sensible, honourable, open as the day: not the hard-hearted, frivolous woman you have turned out to be. Well, Adela, people generally have to reap what they sow; and I fear your harvest will not be a pleasant one."

She pressed her trembling hands together.

"Where are you going?" inquired Lady Acorn, as her husband took his hat up.

"To Leadenhall Street—to Grubb. *Some* one must apprise him of this dreadful truth; and I suppose it falls to me to do it—and a most distressing task it is. Would you have allowed young Cleveland to stand his trial?—to have suffered the penalty of the crime?" broke off Lord Acorn to his daughter.

"It would never have come to that, papa."

"But it would have come to it; it was coming to it. I ask, would you have allowed an innocent lad to be sent over the seas for you?"

Adela shuddered. "I must have spoken then," was her faint answer.

Lord Acorn, jumping into the first cab he met, proceeded to Leadenhall Street, to make this wretched confession to his son-in-law. Had he been making it of himself, he would have felt it less. He was, however, spared the task. Mr. Grubb was not in the City, and Mr. Grubb already knew the truth.

It chanced that, close upon the departure of Lady Acorn and her daughter Grace from Charles Cleveland's cell that morning, Serjeant Mowham was shown into it: and the reader may as well be reminded that the learned Serjeant had not taken up Charles's case in his professional capacity, but simply as an anxious friend. Without going into details, Charles told him that the truth had now come out, his innocence was made apparent to those concerned, and he hoped he should soon see the last of the precious walls he was incarcerated in. Away rushed Serjeant Mowham to Leadenhall Street, asking an explanation of Messrs. Grubb and Howard; and very much surprised did he feel at finding those gentlemen knew nothing.

"I am positive it is a fact," persisted the Serjeant to them. "One cannot mistake Charley's changed tones and looks. Some evidence that exculpates him has turned up, rely upon it, and I thought, of course, you must know what it was. Lady Acorn and one of her daughters went out from him just before I got there."

Mr. Grubb felt curious; rather uneasy. If Charles Cleveland was exonerated, who had been the culprit?

"I shall go and see him at once," he said to Mr. Howard.

And now Charles Cleveland fell into another error. Never supposing but that Mr. Grubb must know at least as much as Lady Acorn knew, he unconsciously betrayed all. In his eagerness to show his kind patron he was not quite the ungrateful wretch he had appeared to be, he betrayed it.

"I never thought of such a thing, sir, as that it was not your

cheque—I mean your own signature," he pleaded. "I'd not have done such a thing for all the world—and after all your goodness to me for so many months! It was only when I came up from Netherleigh on the Monday evening I found there was something wrong with it."

"You heard it from Lady Adela," spoke Mr. Grubb, quietly accepting the mistake.

"Yes. She told me how it was. Mr. Howard was with you then in the dining-room, and his coming had frightened her. She seemed in dreadful distress, and I promised to shield her as far as I could ——"

"You should have confided the truth to me," interrupted Mr. Grubb. "All trouble might have been avoided."

"But how could I?—and after my voluntary promise! What would you have thought of me, sir, had I shifted the blame from myself to lay it upon her?" added Charley, lifting his ingenuous, honest eyes to his master's.

Mr. Grubb did not say what he should have thought. Charles rather misinterpreted the silence: he fancied Mr. Grubb must be angry with him.

"Of course it has been a heavy blow to me, the being accused of such a thing, and to have had to accept the accusation, and to lie here in Newgate, with no prospect before me but transportation; but I ask you what else I could do, sir? I could not clear myself at the expense of Lady Adela."

Mr. Grubb did not answer this appeal. Telling Charles that steps should be taken for his release, and enjoining him to absolute silence as regarded Lady Adela's name, he returned to Leadenhall Street, and held a private conference with his partner.

What passed at it was known only to themselves, or how far Francis Grubb found it necessary to speak of his wife. Mr. Howard noticed one thing—that the young man (young, as compared with himself) looked at moments utterly bewildered; once or twice he talked at random. The following morning was the one fixed for Charles's second examination before Sir Turtle Kite, when, that worthy alderman being satisfied, he must of course be released.

Barely was the conference over and this resolution fixed upon, when a most urgent summons came to Mr. Grubb from Blackheath—his mother was supposed to be dying. He started off without the loss of a moment. And when, some time later, the Earl of Acorn arrived, he found only Mr. Howard, and learnt from him that Charles would be discharged on the following morning.

Just for a moment we must return to Adela. When Lady Acorn left her—after exhausting her whole vocabulary in the art of scolding, and waiting to drink some tea she asked for, for her lips were dry—Adela buried her face on the gold-coloured satin sofa cushion, and indulged her repentance to her heart's content. It was sincere—and bitter. Were the time to come over again—oh, that it could!—far

rather would she cut off her right hand than do what she had done: she would die, rather than do such a thing again. It was altogether a dreadful prospect yet—at least, it might be. What if they would not exonerate Charley without inculpating her? Not her husband; she did not fear him; old Howard, and the bankers, and those aldermen on the bench? How should she meet it? where should she run to? what would the world say of her? Lady Adela started from the cushion affrighted. Her lips were more parched than her mother's had been, and she rang for some tea on her own score.

She sat back in her chair after drinking it, her pretty hands lying listless on her pretty dress, and tried to think matters out. As soon as her husband came home she would throw herself upon his bosom and confess all, and plead for mercy with tears and kisses as she had never pleaded before, and give him her word never to touch another card, and whisper that in future she would be his dear wife. He would not refuse to forgive her; no fear of that; he would tell her not to be naughty again, and make all things right. She would tell him that she might have loved him from the first, for it was the truth, but that she steeled her heart and her temper against him, because of his name and of his being a City man; and she would tell him that she could and should love him from henceforth, that the past was past, and they would be as happy together as the day was long.

A yearning impatience grew upon her for his return as she sat and thought thus. What hour was it? Surely he was at home sometimes earlier than this!

As she turned her head to look at the timepiece on the marble console, Hilson came in, a note on his small silver salver.

"One of the clerks brought it up from Leadenhall Street, my lady," he remarked, as he held it out to her. "He said there was no answer."

It was not her husband's writing, and Lady Adela opened it with trembling fingers. Had some new and dreadful phase turned up in this unhappy business? The fear, that it had, flashed through her.

"Dear Madam,—Mr. Grubb has been sent for to his mother, who is dangerously ill. He requested me to drop you a line to say he should probably remain at Blackheath for the night. I therefore do so, and despatch it to you by a clerk.

"Your obedient servant,

"James Howard."

"So I can't do it," she cried, thinking of all she had been planning out, something like resentment making itself heard in her heart. "What a wretched evening it will be!"

Wretched enough. She did not venture to go to Chenevix House while lying under its wrathful displeasure; she had not the face to show herself elsewhere in this uncertainty and trouble.

"I wish," she burst forth, with a petulant tap of her black satin slipper on the carpet, "I wish that tiresome Mrs. Lynn would get well! Or else die, and have done with it."

The Lady Adela was not altogether in an entirely penitential frame of mind yet.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SIR TURTLE KITE.

What a delightful world this might be if all our fond plans and hopes could but be fulfilled! if no adverse influence crept in to frustrate them!

Never a doubt had crossed the mind of those concerned for the welfare of Charles Cleveland, that he would be set at liberty on Tuesday, the day following the one above spoken of.

It was not to be. Charles was brought up, as previously, for private examination before Alderman Sir Turtle Kite. No evidence was offered; on the contrary, a legal gentleman, one Mr. Primerly, the noted solicitor for the House of Grubb and Howard, intimated that there was none to offer—the charge had been a mistake altogether.

Sir Turtle Kite was a little man, as broad as he was long, with a smiling round face and shiny bald head, the best-hearted, easiest-natured, and pleasantest-tempered of all the bench of aldermen. He would fain have been lenient to the worst offender; added to which he knew about as much of the law as he did of the new comet, just then spreading its tail in the heavens. Therefore, unconsciously lacking the acumen to make an able administrator of justice, Sir Turtle, as a natural sequence, was especially fond of sitting to administer it. Latterly he had sat daily, and generally alone, much gout and dyspepsia prevailing just then amidst his brother aldermen. The Lord Mayor of the year was a bon vivant, and gave a civic dinner five days in the week. Certain recent judicial decisions of Sir Turtle's, notably mild as usual, had been called in question by the newspapers; and one of them had sharply attacked him in a leading article, asking him why he did not discharge every prisoner brought before him, and order him a luncheon.

Reading this article at breakfast, Sir Turtle came forth to the magisterial bench this day, Tuesday, smarting under its castigation. And, to the utter surprise of every one in the private justice room, he declined to release the prisoner, Charles Cleveland. Rubbing his bald head, and making the best little speech he could—he was no orator—Sir Turtle talked of the fatal effects that might arise from the miscarriage of justice, and his resolve to uphold it in all its integrity.

Mr. Grubb was not present. Mr. Howard, who was, stared with astonishment, having always known the benevolent little alderman to be as pliant as a bit of cap-paper. James Howard said what he

dared; as much as it was expedient to say, against the alderman's decision; but to no purpose. Sir Turtle, trying to put the wisdom of an owl into his round face, demanded to know, if the prisoner was not guilty, who was? This not being satisfactorily explained, he remanded the prisoner to the following morning, when he would probably be committed for trial. And, with this consolatary decision, Charles was conveyed back to his lodgings in Newgate.

Mr. Howard, somewhat put out by the contretemps, and by the alderman's rejection of his declared testimony that the prisoner was innocent, wrote a note to Lord Acorn with the news, and sent it to Chenevix House by hand. He had promised to notify the release of Charles, when that should be accomplished. But he had to notify a very different fact.

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed Lord Acorn, when he opened the note late in the afternoon, for he (also relieved of his worst fears) had been out gadding. "This is a dreadful thing!"

"What is the matter?" cried his wife, who was sitting there with Grace. "One would think the world was coming to an end, to look at your face."

The Earl's face just then was considerably lengthened. He stood twirling his whiskers, and gazing at James Howard's very plain handwriting.

"They won't release Cleveland, Howard writes me," said the Earl. "Things have taken a cross turn."

Grace closed her book and clasped her hands. Lady Acorn threw down her knitting, and inquired who would not release him?

"The magistrate who has sat to hear the case," replied Lord Acorn. "Sir—what's the odd name?—Turtle Kite. He refuses, absolutely, to release Charles, until the true culprit shall be brought before him—seems to think it is a trick, Howard says."

"Good heavens!" cried Lady Grace, foreseeing more dire consequences than she would have liked to speak of. "What will become of Charles? What of Adela? Oh, papa! they cannot compel her to appear, can they?——to take Charles's place?"

"I don't know what they can do," gloomily responded the Earl. "Hang these aldermen! What right have they to turn obstinate, when a prisoner's innocency is vouched for?"

"And where *is* the prisoner?" cried my lady.

"Taken back to Newgate. Is to be brought up again to-morrow, *to be committed for trial.* Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish!"

Grace bit her pale and trembling lips. "Was Mr. Grubb at the examination, papa?"

"No. Grubb's at Blackheath. Has not been up, Howard says, since he went down yesterday. What on earth is to be done?"

"The best thing to do is for you to go to Blackheath and see Mr. Grubb," promptly cried the Countess. "If Adela were a child, I should beat her. Bringing all this worry and disgrace upon us!"

"I couldn't go there and be back for the dinner," cried he. For they were engaged that evening to a state dinner at a duke's.

"Bother dinner!" irascibly retorted Lady Acorn. "If this affair can't be stopped, Adela will have to be smuggled over to the Continent, and stay in hiding there. If it is *not* stopped, and her name has to appear, we shall never be able to show our faces at a dinner-table again."

Lord Acorn passed his hand over his perplexed brow. Look at the affair in what way they would, it seemed to present nothing but difficulty. Once Charles Cleveland was committed for trial, what would be the end of it? He *could not* be allowed to stand his trial —and what might not that involve for Adela?

Lord Acorn, hating personal trouble of all kinds, especially trouble so disagreeable as this, betook himself—not to Blackheath, as enjoined by his wife, but to the City. He would see Mr. Howard first, and hear what his opinion was. Jumping out of the cab which had conveyed him to Leadenhall Street, he jumped against Serjeant Mowham.

"No good your going up," cried the Serjeant. "Howard has left, and Grubb seems to be nowhere to-day."

"Have you heard about poor Charley?" asked Lord Acorn.

"Of course I have; that has brought me here. Primerly came to my chambers on other business, and told me what had happened. I came down here at once to catch one of the partners—or both of them—and see if there's anything to be done."

"What can be done?" returned Lord Acorn.

"Be shot if I know," said the Serjeant. "It will be a serious thing for Charley, mind you, if he does get committed for trial—as Sir Turtle Kite has promised."

"What an ill-conditioned, revengeful man that Sir Turtle Kite must be!"

"There you are wrong, my lord. He is just the contrary: one of the sunniest-natured little men you can picture, and about as able upon the bench as my old wig would be if you stuck it there. The newspapers have been going in to him lately for his leniency, so I suppose he thinks he must make an example of somebody. One of the papers had a bantering article this morning, suggesting that Sir Turtle should open a luncheon room at the court, and treat the delinquents who appeared before him to bottled stout and oysters. That article, I suspect, is the cause of his turning crusty to-day. Look here," added the Serjeant, lowering his voice and catching hold of the other's button-hole, "what is there at the bottom of all this matter? Who was it that Charley made himself the scapegoat for? Do you know?"

As it chanced, they were jostled just then by some one of the many passers-by in the busy street—nearly pushed off the causeway. Lord Acorn, forgetting his usual superlative equanimity, allowed himself to be put out by it, and so evaded an answer.

"Nobody does know, that I can find out," said the Serjeant, returning to the charge, and facing Lord Acorn, with whom he had long been on intimate terms: "and Charley makes a mystery of it. I suspect it was some one of those wild blades he has been hand-in-glove with lately—and that he won't betray him."

"Ah, yes, no doubt," carelessly assented Lord Acorn, his face wearing a deeper tinge than ordinary. "I wonder where Howard is? Charley must be saved."

"It will be of no use your seeing Howard, Lord Acorn—except for any odds and ends of information he might afford you. The affair is out of his hands now."

"But it can't be out of Mr. Grubb's!"

"Indeed it is. It is in Sir Turtle Kite's."

"Could one do any good with *him?*"

Serjeant Mowham laughed. "I can't say, one way or the other. You might try, perhaps. Don't say, though, that I recommended it."

The peer smoothed his brow, smooth enough before to all appearance. How often do these smiling brows hide a heavy load of perplexity within!

"As for me, I must be off," added the Serjeant. "I've a consultation on for five o'clock, at my chambers, and I believe five has struck."

He bustled away, leaving Lord Acorn in the crowd. Thought is quick. That nobleman was saying to himself, "What if I *do* see Sir Turtle?—who knows but I might come over him by persuasion? Wonder where he is to be found?"

He glanced up and down Leadenhall Street, at its houses on this side and on that, as if, haply, he might discern the name. During this survey he found himself subjected to an increased amount of jostling, and became aware that the clerks were pouring out of the offices of Grubb and Howard.

"Oh—ah," began Lord Acorn, addressing a young man who was nearly the last, all his nonchalance of manner in full force again, "Can you tell me where Sir Turtle Kite is to be found?"

"Sir Turtle Kite, sir?" replied the young clerk civilly. "I think—I'm not quite sure—but I think his place is somewhere down by the river. Here—Aitcheson"—stopping an older clerk—"where is Sir Turtle Kite's place? This gentleman is asking."

"Tooley Street—forget the number—can't mistake it," replied the other, who seemed in a vast hurry to get away, and threw back the words as he went.

"Tooley Street," repeated Lord Acorn aloud, by way of impressing the name on his mind. "Some commercial stronghold, I suppose. What business is he?"

"He's a tallow merchant, sir."

"Ah—thank you—a tallow merchant," repeated his lordship, with a deprecatory shrug of the shoulders at the objectionable word,

tallow. "Thank you very much." And the young man, who was of good breeding, lifted his hat and walked away.

Lord Acorn had as much notion in which direction he must look for Tooley Street as he might have had in looking for the way to the North Pole. Making another inquiry, this time of a policeman, the road was pointed out to him, and the information given that it was "not far." That, at least, was the policeman's opinion.

So Lord Acorn, whose cab had been dismissed at first, and who liked walking, for he was a lithe, active man for his age, at length reached Tooley Street, and began a pilgrimage up and down its narrow confines, which seemed to be choked up with cumbersome drays and trolleys. Presently he discovered a huge pile of dark buildings, all along the wide face of which was posted the name of the firm: "Turtle Kite, Tanner, Rex, and Co." The goal at last!

Wondering within himself how Sir Turtle Kite, or any other person possessing rational instincts and ordinary lungs, could exist in such an atmosphere of dirt and turmoil, Lord Acorn looked about for the entrance. There was none to be seen: and he was beginning seriously to speculate whether Turtle Kite, Tanner, Rex, and Co. entered the building by means of a rope ladder affixed to one of the little square holes that served for windows, when a man, who had the appearance of a porter, came out of a narrow, dark entry.

"Is there any entrance to this building, my man?"

"Entrance is up here, sir; waggon entrance on t'other side."

"Oh—ah—you belong to it, I perceive. Do you happen to know whether Sir Turtle Kite is in?"

"There's nobody in at all, sir; warehouses is shut for the evening," returned the porter. "Sir Turtle don't come here much hisself now; he leaves things mostly to Tanner and Rex. They'll both be here to-morrow morning, sir. Watchman's coming on presently."

"Ah, yes, no doubt," assented Lord Acorn in his suave way. "Then Sir Turtle does not live here, I presume."

The porter checked a laugh at the notion. "Sir Turtle lives at Brixton, sir. Leastways, it's between Brixton and Clapham. Rosemary Lodge, sir—a rare beautiful place it is."

Brixton now! To Lord Acorn's dismayed mind it seemed that he might almost as well start for the moon; and for a few seconds he hesitated. But—having undertaken this adventurous expedition, adventurous in more ways than one—he must carry it through for his unhappy daughter's sake.

"Do you fancy Sir Turtle is likely to be at home now, at—ah, Rosemary House—if I go there, my man?"

"Most likely, sir. He is mostly at home earlier than this. Sir Turtle is very fond of his gardens and greenhouses, you see, and makes haste home to 'em. He's got no wife nor child. But it's Rosemary Lodge, sir; not Rosemary House."

"Ah, yes, thank you—Rosemary Lodge," repeated his lordship, dropping a shilling into the porter's hand, and hailing the first cab he met.

"Rosemary Lodge, Brixton," said he to the driver.

"Yes, sir. What part of Brixton?"

"Don't know at all," said his lordship. "Never was at Brixton in my life."

"Brixton's a straggling sort of place, you see, sir. I might be driving you about ——"

"It is between Brixton and Clapham," interrupted the Earl. "Rosemary Lodge: Sir Turtle Kite's."

"Oh come, the name's something," said the man, as he drove off.

Rosemary Lodge was not difficult to find, once the locality was reached. It was a large, pretty white villa, with painted glass borders surrounding its windows, and it stood in the midst of a spacious lawn dotted with beds of bright flowers. Walking round the gravel drive, Lord Acorn rang at the door, which was speedily opened by a man in chocolate-coloured livery.

"Is Sir Turtle Kite at home?"

"Yes, sir; but he is at dinner; just sat down to it."

"At dinner!" echoed Lord Acorn. "I want to see him very particularly."

"Well, sir, Sir Turtle does not much like to be disturbed at his dinner," hesitated the man. "Perhaps you could wait?—or call again?"

"Look here," said Lord Acorn, hunting in his pocket for his card-case, a bright idea seizing him, "you shall ask Sir Turtle to allow me to go into the dining-room to him, and I'll say the few words I have to say while he dines. I suppose he is alone? I won't disturb him from it. Hang it!" muttered his lordship, finding he had not his card-case with him. "You must take in my name: Lord Acorn."

This colloquy took place in the hall. At that moment another serving man came out of the dining-room—his master wanted to know what the stir was. Lord Acorn caught a glimpse of a well-spread table, and of a round good-humoured face above it. "Announce me," he rapidly said: and the servant did so.

"Lord Acorn."

Up rose Sir Turtle, his beaming countenance looking its surprise, his napkin tucked into his uppermost button-hole. Lord Acorn, a fascinating-mannered man as any living, entered upon his courtly apology, his short explanation, and offered his hand. In two minutes his lordship was seated at the dinner-table, regaling himself with real turtle soup, served out of a silver tureen; he and his host laughing and talking together as freely as though they were friends of years.

"It is so very good of you to ask me to partake of your dinner in this impromptu way, Sir Turtle," remarked his lordship. "I should have lost mine. We were to have dined—I and my wife—with the

Duke of Dunford this evening, but I could not have got back for it. As to my business, the little matter I have come down to you to speak of, I won't trouble you with that until dinner's over."

"Quite right, my lord," said the knight. "Never unite eating and business together when it can be avoided. As to your lordship's partaking of my dinner, such as it is, the obligation lies on my side, and I think it very condescending of you."

Sir Turtle Kite, knight, alderman, and tallow merchant, held the same reverence for dukes and lords that many another Sir Turtle holds, and his round face and his little bald head shone again with the honour of having the Earl of Acorn as a guest. But he need not have disparaged his dinner by saying "such as it is!" Lord Acorn had rarely sat down to a better. The knight liked to dine well, and he had a rare good cook.

"As rich as Crœsus, I know; these City men always are," thought Lord Acorn. "And he is as genial a little man as one could wish to meet, and not objectionable in any way," mentally added his lordship as the dinner went on.

It was not until the wine was on the table, and the servants were gone, that Lord Acorn entered upon and explained the subject which had brought him. He spoke rather lightly, interspersing praises of the wines, which for goodness matched the dishes. One bottle of choice claret, brought up specially for his lordship to taste, was truly of rare quality.

"It would be so very dreadful a thing if this honest-minded, chivalrous young fellow were to be compelled to stand a trial," continued the Earl confidentially, as he sipped the claret. "Painful to your generous heart, I am quite sure, Sir Turtle, as well as to mine and Mr. Grubb's."

"Of course it would, my lord."

"And I thought I would come to you myself and privately explain. By allowing this young fellow to be released to-morrow, you will be doing a righteous and a generous act."

Sir Turtle nodded. "But what a young fool the lad must be to have allowed the world to think him guilty!" he remarked. "*Who* is it that he is screening, do you say, my lord? Some unfortunate acquaintance of his, who had got into a mess? Was the fellow also staying at Grubb's?"

Lord Acorn coughed. "Yes; the culprit was staying in Grosvenor Square at the time. He, the true criminal, is out of the law's reach now, and can't be caught," added the Earl, drawing upon his invention. "And we wish to keep his name quiet, and give him another chance. But, that the prisoner who has been twice before you is innocent as the day, I give you my solemn word of honour. I hope you will release him, dear Sir Turtle."

"I will," assented Sir Turtle. "There's my hand upon it. And those libellous newspapers may go and be—hanged."

Perhaps the word hanged was not exactly the one Sir Turtle rapped out in his zeal. But he was not before his own magisterial bench just then. Lord Acorn clasped the hand warmly. He had taken quite a fancy to the genial little alderman, and he felt inexpressibly grateful.

"I do thank you; I thank you truly—for the foolish young fellow's sake. What claret this is, to be sure! Not equal to the port, you say? I have a bin of very good port myself, and if you will dine with me to-morrow, Sir Turtle, you shall taste it. Seven o'clock, sharp. Come a little before it. I shall be glad to see you."

Sir Turtle Kite, in his gratification, hardly knew whether he stood on his head or his heels. He had never, to his recollection, been bidden to an Earl's dinner-table before, and was profuse in thanks.

"I'll ask Grubb to join us," said Lord Acorn. "You know him?"

"Ay, we all know Grubb. What a charming young man he is! Young compared with you and me, my lord—especially with me," added Sir Turtle. "So honourable, so good, and so prosperous!"

Lord Acorn made quite an evening of it: looking at the greenhouses, and the pinery, and the growing melons, with all the rest of the horticultural treasures at Rosemary Lodge: and went back to town on the top of a West-end omnibus.

CHAPTER XXIV.

INFATUATION.

MIDNIGHT. Pacing her chamber in her light dressing-robe, its open sleeves thrown back from her restless hands, as if for coolness, was the Lady Adela. Throughout the whole business she had never been so terrified as now, had never before realised her dangerous position in all its fulness. Her heart and her brow were alike beating with fever heat.

On the Monday evening, for we must go back a day, after receiving the news that her husband would probably not be home, as conveyed to her by note from Mr. Howard, Adela did not spend quite the solitary hours she had anticipated. Grace came to her: and though rather given to call Grace an "old lecturer," Adela, was heartily glad to see her now. The evening's solitude had brought all her fears back again, and dismal doubts chased each other through her mind.

Ever thoughtful and kind, though she did condemn Adela, Grace came to bring her the tidings that Charles Cleveland would be discharged on the morrow—for Lord Acorn, on his return from that afternoon's interview with Mr. Howard, in Leadenhall Street, had spoken of the release as an assured fact. The more bitter the condemnation by her father and mother of Adela, and it really was bitter, the greater need, thought Grace, that someone should stand by her: and here she was, with her cheering news. And the relief it brought no pen can express. Adela forgot her fears; ay, and her repentance.

She became her own light-headed self again, and provoked Grace by her saucy words. In the great revulsion of feeling she almost forgot her trouble; nay, resented it.

"What a shame!—to frighten me as papa and mamma did this afternoon! I thought old Howard would not be quite a bear; and I knew my husband had all power in his hand—if he chose to exercise it."

"Any way, Adela, he has exercised it. You have a husband in a thousand. I do hope you will show your gratitude by behaving to him well in future."

"I daresay! I did think of—what *do* you suppose I thought of doing, Gracie? That if he proved obdurate, as papa hinted, I would win him over by saying, 'Let us kiss and be friends.'"

"If you could have so won him."

"If!" retorted Adela, a mocking smile on her pretty lips. "You think he cares for me a little, Gracie; but you do not know how much yet. I believe—now don't you start away at my irreverence!—that he loves me better than heaven. I shall not do it now."

"Do what?" asked Grace.

"Kiss and be friends. Neither the one nor the other. I shall abuse him instead; reproach him for having stood out so long about that poor wretched Charlie: and I shall hold him at arm's length as before. The time is not come for me to be reconciled to *him*."

"You do not mean it, Adela! You cannot be so wicked."

"Not mean it! You will see. So will he. Tra-la-la-la! Oh, what a horrible nightmare it has been!—and what a mercy to awaken from it!"

She laid hold of her pretty gold-sprigged muslin dress with both hands; she had not changed it; and waltzed across the room and back again. Grace wondered whether she could be growing really heartless; she was not born so: but of course it must be a glad relief.

The old proverb, "When the devil was sick," no doubt so well known to the reader that it need not be quoted, is exemplified very often indeed in our everyday life. With the removal of the danger, Adela no longer remembered it had been there; only too willingly did she thrust it away from her. She passed a good night, and the next day was seen driving gaily in the Park and elsewhere with her friend the young Lady Cust—who was just as frivolous as herself.

Evening came: Tuesday evening, please remember. Mr. Grubb did not come home; neither had Adela heard from him: she supposed him to be still at Blackheath, and sat down to dinner alone. She wondered whither Charley had betaken himself on his release: and whether he would be likely to call upon her. She hoped not: her cheeks would take a tinge of shame at facing him. Suppose he were to come in that evening!

Charley did not come. But Frances Chenevix did. Frances, very downright, very outspoken, had been honestly indignant with Adela

for the part she had played, she had not scrupled to tell her so, and they had quarrelled. Therefore Adela was not much pleased to see her. She found that Frances had been dining at home, and had ordered the carriage round here on her way back to Lady Sarah Hope's. It was about nine o'clock.

"Is your husband at home?" she inquired of Adela, without any circumlocution, when she entered the drawing-room.

"No. He has not been home since yesterday morning. I expect he is at Blackheath with that wavering old mother of his, dying to-day and well to-morrow," listlessly added Adela.

"Had he been at home I should have sent him round to the mother and Grace; they are so frightfully uneasy."

"The mother?" repeated Adela. "Is she back already from the Dunfords'?"

"She has not been to the Dunfords'," said Frances. "I suppose you know of the dreadful turn affairs have taken with Charles Cleveland?"

Something like a drop of iced water seemed to trickle down Adela's back. "I know nothing—I have heard nothing," she gasped. "Is Charles not set at liberty?"

"Good gracious, no! And he is not going to be. The City magistrates won't do it; they will commit him for trial."

It was as if a whole pailful of iced water were pouring down now. "Oh, Frances! It cannot be true!"

"It is too true. Mr. Howard wrote this afternoon to tell papa that Charles was remanded back to prison and would be committed in the morning. Papa went off at once to see about it, and mamma sent an excuse to the Dunfords. I was to have dined quietly with Grace and Mary this evening; and I heard all this when I arrived."

"And—is papa not back yet?" again gasped Adela.

"No; and mamma can hardly contain herself for uneasiness. For, of course you see what this implies?"

Adela was not sure whether she saw it or not. She only gazed at her sister.

"It means that either Charles must suffer—or you, Adela, so far as can be gathered from present aspects. And the question at home is—can they allow him to suffer, even if he be willing, and the truth does not transpire in other ways?"

"To—suffer?" hesitated Adela.

"To stand his trial."

"Why does not Mr. Grubb stop all this?" angrily flashed Adela, in her sick tremor.

"Mr. Grubb would no doubt be only glad to do it—and Mr. Howard also would be now, but it is out of their hands. Once a magistrate turns adverse, it is all up. Charley's lawyer impressed upon the magistrate, one Sir Turtle Kite, that his client was not the individual who was guilty: very well, said Sir Turtle, bring forward the individual

who was guilty, and he would release Charley; not before. Adela, we have not seen the mother cry often, but she sobbed to-night."

Suddenly, violently, almost as though she had caught the infection from the words, Adela burst into a storm of sobs. The revulsion from terror to ease had told upon her feelings the previous night, but not as that of ease to terror was telling this. What of her boastful, saucy avowals to Grace now?

Leaving her sister to digest the ill-starred news, Frances departed; she could not keep the carriage longer, as it was wanted by Lady Sarah. Adela sat up till past eleven, and then, shivering inwardly, went to her room, but she was too uneasy to go to bed. Dismissing her maid, she put on a dressing-gown—as was told at the beginning of the chapter—and so prepared to pass the wretched night. Now pacing the carpet in an agony, now gazing eagerly from the open window at every cab that rattled across the square, lest happily it might bring her husband. She could see no refuge anywhere but in him.

The intelligent reader has of course discerned that it was on this same evening Lord Acorn was at Rosemary Lodge, making things right with Sir Turtle Kite. About eleven o'clock the Earl got home, bringing with him his glad tidings. Lady Acorn, relieved of her fears, took up her temper again, and was more wrathfully bitter against Adela than ever. But Adela knew nothing of all this.

With the morning, Wednesday, Sir Turtle Kite appeared on the magisterial bench, and the prisoner, Charles Cleveland, was brought before him. As before, the proceedings were heard in private. Mr. Grubb was present; had come up specially from Blackheath. He assured Sir Turtle that the prisoner was wholly innocent, had been made the unconscious dupe of another: upon which Sir Turtle, in a learned speech that even his own legal clerk could make neither head nor tail of, discharged the prisoner, and graciously informed him he left the court "without a stain upon his character."

Charles looked half-dazed amidst the sea of faces around him: he made his way to Mr. Grubb. "I thank you with my whole heart, sir," he whispered, deprecatingly. "I shall never forget your kindness."

"Let it be a warning to you for all your future life," was the grave, kind answer.

The question flashed through Charley's mind—where was he to go? That he had forfeited his post at Grubb and Howard's, and his residence in Mr. Grubb's house, went without telling. At that moment Lord Acorn advanced from some dark region of the outer passage.

"You are going down to Netherleigh this afternoon with your father, Charles," said he. "But you can come home with me first and get some lunch. Wait a minute: I want to speak to Mr. Grubb."

Mr. Grubb appeared to have vanished. Lord Acorn could not see him anywhere. He wrote a line in pencil, asking him to dine with him that day at seven o'clock, sent it to Leadenhall Street, and got into a cab with Charley.

"Oh," said the Countess of Acorn, when she saw the ex-prisoner arrive, "so you *are* here, young man! It is more than I expected.

"And more than I did—since yesterday," confessed he.

"Pray what name do you give to that devoted chivalry of yours, Charley?—the taking of another's sins upon your own shoulders?" whispered Frances Chenevix, who happened to be at her father's. In fact, Colonel Hope and Lady Sarah, outwardly anxious, and inwardly scandalised at the whole affair, beginning with Adela and ending with Charley, had despatched her to Chenevix House for any news there might be.

"I don't know," answered Charley. "Perhaps you might call it infatuation."

"That was just it," nodded Frances. "Don't you go and be an idiot again. *That* is my mother's best name for you."

Charles nodded assentingly. He saw the past in its true light now. He was a changed man. His confinement and reflections in prison, combined with the prospect of being condemned as a felon, from which he had then seen no chance of escape save by his own confession, which he had persistently resolved not to make, had added years to his experience in life. He was a light-hearted, light-headed boy when he entered Newgate; he came out of it older and graver than his years.

More severely than for aught else did he blame himself for having responded in ever so slight a degree to the ridiculous flirtation commenced by Lady Adela; and for having fallen into the worshipping of her almost as he might have worshipped an angel; and he thanked God in his heart, now, that he had never been betrayed into offering her a disrespectful look or word. She belonged to her husband; not to him; and to be disloyal to either of them Charley would have regarded as the most consummate folly or sin.

Was he cured of that infatuation? Ay, he was. The heartless conduct of Lady Adela, in leaving him to bear the brunt of the crime and the disgrace that came of it, without giving heed or aid, had helped to cure him. He had not wished that she should sacrifice her good name to save his, though the whole sin lay with her; but he did think she might have offered him one little word of sympathy. He lay languishing within the walls of that awful prison for her sake, and she had never conveyed to him, by note or message, so much as the intimation, I am sorry for you. Charles Cleveland could not know that Adela had been afraid to do it; afraid lest the smallest notice on her part should lead to the betrayal of herself. What she would have done, what they would all have done, had he really been committed to take his trial, she does not know to this day. However, to him her silence had appeared to be heartless indifference; and that, combined with his own danger and his prolonged reflection, had served to change and cure him.

"I am very thankful, Charles," breathed Grace, and the tears stood

in her eyes as she took his hand. "No one knows what trouble this has been to me."

"I have more cause to be thankful than you, Grace; and I think I am," he answered. "It has been to me a life's lesson."

"Ay. You will not fall into mischief again, Charley?" she said, almost entreatingly. "You will not lose your wits for a married woman, as you did for Adela?"

"If ever I get trapped by any woman, married or single, again, all courtly smiles one day, when she wants to amuse herself and serve her turn, and all careless neglect the next, like a confounded weathercock, I'll give you leave to transport me to a penal settlement in earnest," was Charley's wrathful interruption, the sense of his wrongs pressing upon him sorely. "But let me thank *you*, Grace," he added, his tone changing to one of deep feeling, "for all your care and concern for me."

Charles could not eat any lunch, though the table was well spread. In spite of his release from the great danger, he was altogether miserable. Lady Acorn talked at him; Lady Frances, taking matters lightly after her custom, joked and laughed, and handed him all the sweets upon the table, one dish after another. It was all one to Charley: and perhaps he felt that he merited Lady Acorn's reproaches more than he did the offered sweets. He had not yet seen his father and his step-mother. For the past two or three days they had been staying with their relative, the Earl of Cleveland; a confirmed invalid, who lived in seclusion a few miles out of London.

They all departed for Netherleigh in the course of the afternoon: the Rector, Lady Mary and the baby, Charles joining them at the railway station. What was to become of him in future? It was a question he seriously put to himself. Surely he had bought experience, if any young man ever had in this world; an experience that would leave behind it its lasting and bitter pain.

Seven o'clock—nay, some fifteen minutes before it—brought Sir Turtle Kite to the Earl of Acorn's. Sir Turtle enjoyed the visit and the dinner immensely—though he frankly avowed his opinion that his own port wine was the best. For once the Earl's wife made herself gracious; tart though she might be at times, she knew something of gratitude; and Grace, who made the fourth at table, could not keep her heart's thankfulness out of her manner—for where should they all have been without Sir Turtle?

But Mr. Grubb did not make his appearance. Neither had Lord Acorn heard from him.

(*To be continued.*)

THE SAPPHIRE CROSS.

By Joyce Darrell.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRIAL.

THE forms of the Italian law are very slow, and had things taken their usual course, it is probable that Guido would have languished a year or eighteen months in prison before his trial. But Count Cioronski had some influence in high places, and he strained it to the utmost.

A savage haste, a fierce desire to punish seemed to possess him. The murder had wrought a marked change in him. After the kind of epileptic attack which he had on the evening of the funeral, he had apparently recovered his health, but remained moody, sullen, and subject to frequent outbursts of excitement.

He urged on the trial incessantly with a persistency suggestive of monomania ; but he shrank from all knowledge of its details. His impatience under interrogation was remarkable, and showed more clearly than anything else how unhinged was his mind. It was impossible to tell if he regretted his wife, but it was plain that he brooded over her end.

Great interest was felt in the trial, but small doubt as to its result. It was understood that the Public Prosecutor had rarely had a more neatly fitting piece of circumstantial evidence to bring before the Court.

Possibly this happy conviction on the part of the public was helped by the disparity of social condition between the victim and the accused. When a beautiful and high-born woman is murdered, society is laudably anxious for somebody to be punished forthwith. And when the supposed assassin turns out to be a poor wretch who has not a friend in the world, society, disappointed of a piquant scandal, feels that the sooner the wretch is disposed of the better.

Generally when the case is an interesting one, some ambitious young advocate offers himself in the prisoner's defence. But from some cause or other Guido had not received even that cheap proof of interest in his fate, and until the very day before the trial his only chance lay with the humble lawyer nominated on such occasions by the Court. All at once, however, the papers announced that a rising member of the bar had taken the case up warmly.

They added, it was understood that the fee was to be paid by the young woman whom rumour indicated as the accused man's sweetheart. This news made a buzz round poor Lucia's name. Many

explanations were offered of her sudden accession to wealth, and, needless to say, they were none of them particularly charitable.

And yet the whole simple truth was that Lucia had received unexpected notice from France of some few thousand francs left her by an uncle of her mother's. Instantly she had gone to a money-lender, and at a ruinous rate of interest had raised the sum necessary for Guido's defence. That moment was the first happy one she had known for six months, during which time she had lived—how? Alas! as one lives without one gleam of comfort, one throb of hope, upheld but by the unlauded heroism of ordinary duty, bearing in the silence of resignation, with the courage of despair, the weary weight of the day's hours, and the sleepless torture of leaden-footed nights!

"See how changed she is!" remarked Beppina to Gigia as she passed them.

"She never was much to look at that I could see," answered Gigia, and in that remark gave the measure of sympathy which Lucia met with, in these days, from her neighbours. They were not hard-hearted, but they did not understand her, and sympathy is difficult without comprehension.

When the painter's trial came on at last, the Court was crowded to suffocation.

Every spectator as he came in looked first with the coarse scrutiny of hostility at the prisoner. The purely scenical instincts of justice in the public were gratified by observing that his pallor was extreme.

"He looks sullen," said most, but a few saw deeper and felt for the proud young spirit so cruelly tried which looked out of Guido's mournful, steady eyes.

He was horribly changed—poor boy!—but there was nobody there just then to note that.

With a weary rather than a dejected air, he sat in a kind of box with iron bars in front of it. On each side of him was a carabineer bearing a shouldered musket, and so motionless in his uniform and cocked hat, as to look more like a graven image than a man.

The Chief Judge, or President as he is called, took his seat between his two silent colleagues, the lesser judges, and in front of the bench to be occupied by the witnesses.

To his left was the black-robed form and keen, inquisitive face of the Public Prosecutor—below him sat Guido's counsel.

A fat little usher, arrayed like the lawyers in a toga, ran forward and irritably called out "*Silence.*" He had previously announced "The Court" in a portentous voice, and seemed to wonder that the blood of the public had not been congealed with awe.

A clerk, in the high nasal tone peculiar to such functionaries, read out the indictment against the prisoner. This set forth how Guido Zondara, painter, aged twenty-two, native of—in the Abruzzi (the document went into every imaginable detail of place and parentage),

had by stealth on the evening of the 14th August 18— introduced himself into the dwelling of Count Stanislas Cioronski, and there, deliberately, and for the sake of gain, murdered the said Count's consort, the noble lady Wanda Cioronski.

That was what the long string of involved sentences came to, and when the reading ceased, the witnesses for the prosecution were called.

The procedure of Italian criminal courts is quite different from ours, and is closely modelled on the French system. The President alone has the right of direct interrogation, and any questions put by anybody else to the witnesses must come through him. The Public Prosecutor strains every nerve to obtain a condemnation, and proceeds on the assumption that the prisoner is guilty. On the other hand the accused has the right to check and (through the Judge) to question the witnesses, and in this way not unfrequently perhaps influences the jury in his own favour.

For the sake of brevity, we will pass over all interruptions, and simply report the evidence against Guido in as condensed a form as possible.

The first witness called was Carlotta Tognetti, the murdered woman's maid. She related how on the fatal evening she was sitting as usual at work in the ante-chamber of her employer's apartment. The door opening upon the common staircase of the house (which was of course let out in flats) had been left unclosed on account of the heat. The Countess who was expecting her husband to return and take her for a late drive, was lying half-asleep upon the sofa in her bedroom. It was about nine o'clock—not later certainly. The man-servant was out, and the cook was in his own regions in the *mezzanino*, out of call.

The prisoner came to the ante-chamber door, and asked for the Count. On hearing that he was not at home he looked, the witness thought, annoyed, lingered a moment, and finally said that he would pay a visit to a friend on the fourth floor, and return later on the chance of finding the Count then. A few moments later the witness feeling the heat oppressive went down into the street. She left the ante-chamber door open, as she had not the key and intended to be away but five minutes. Might have been absent a little longer, but not much. She remained at the street door talking to the porter, and was positive that during that interval nobody passed in or out. The report of a pistol inside the house startled her, and she ran upstairs to find her mistress shot through the head.

The Countess's rings, watch, and a sapphire cross which she constantly wore were missing. They had been all together in a china tray on the dressing-table. The witness could not say positively that she had seen the sapphire cross on the day of the murder, but she thought it very unlikely that she would not have missed it had it been absent before the other things were taken.

The pistol was one which the Countess always kept loaded in her room. This was a fancy of hers, against which the Count had constantly protested.

Carlotta was followed by Guiseppe Baroni, copyist of pictures, a very old, very shabby, dejected man, who gave his evidence with the most unmistakeable reluctance. He had known Guido many years, and the young man would sometimes pay him a visit of an evening. Had formerly lodged with a family at the top of the house of which Count Cioronski occupied the first floor. Meeting the prisoner in the street one day shortly before the murder, he told him that he had changed his residence. It seemed to him at the time that Guido understood him, but he might have been mistaken.

After a slight snub administered to him for this doubt cast upon his own infallibility, Signor Guiseppe Baroni was allowed to retire. He remained in the Court—an unconsciously pathetic figure—throughout the trial, listening with the painful, perplexed attention of the old, and every now and again raising his trembling hands to brush away the tears that coursed silently down his withered cheeks.

The next two witnesses were the porters of the *palazzo.*

It must be mentioned here that this house like many such old buildings in Italy, had two large entrances in different streets. The staircase—single throughout the upper part of its course—divided at the landing of the first floor into two branches communicating respectively with the entrances.

The porter of one door—the principal one—deposed to having seen Guido Zondara enter, but not to having seen him leave again. He remembered Carlotta's descending, and swore positively that during the time she stood at the door talking to him nobody entered the house from his side.

The other porter was almost stone-deaf, so that his evidence—which was of a negative character—was taken with extreme difficulty.

He stated that he was no longer porter of the palazzo, having been removed some weeks after the murder, on account of his deafness. The street door by his lodge could be opened from within (as usual in Italy) by anybody pulling the cord which hung beside it. Persons passing in and out constantly left it ajar. He was rheumatic, and in summer-time when the air was pleasant he did not always get up to shut the door. Had found the system answer very well, until the murder, which had shocked him very much. On that evening about the same number of people as usual had passed through. He had not noticed any of them particularly.

The deaf porter was followed by Pietro Siccoli. He had known Guido at the Art Institute. On the day of the murder the prisoner had come to work in the same studio with himself.

The next morning, Pietro happening to knock over a heap of Guido's things, found a sapphire cross, which struck him because of the beauty of the setting. He laughingly asked if it were a love

token, and Guido taking it from him rather hastily said that it had been given him to pawn by a young girl living in the house which he had just quitted.

Pietro going out shortly heard all the newspaper sellers bawling the news of the murder. Impelled by curiosity he went to the scene of the event, and found a crowd round the door and Carlotta talking volubly. She mentioned that among other objects a sapphire cross was missing, and the witness in the first moment of surprise let slip that he had just seen such an object in the prisoner's hands. "I was a prating idiot," observed the young man, remorsefully.

"On the contrary, to serve the ends of justice, even against a friend, is an act of which every good citizen should be proud," replied the President.

This Spartan remark raised a little applause, especially among the ushers; but it is to be supposed that Pietro Siccoli was not inspired with a spirit of lofty patriotism, for he looked unconvinced.

"Besides mentioning the prisoner's possession of the cross, did you also report how he accounted for it?" asked the Judge.

"Of course I did," exclaimed Pietro, naïvely. "I told everybody over and over again. It was the only way in which I could hope to undo the mischief I had done."

The President cleared his throat somewhat elaborately, and the Public Prosecutor swooped down on the proceedings with a peculiarly trenchant interrogation. Pietro was riddled with questions; he grew confused, hot, miserable, and was dismissed at last in a condition of bewildered despair.

The next called was Count Cioronski, whose appearance naturally caused a sensation. Every neck was craned in his direction; every eye-glass levelled at him as he entered dressed in the deepest mourning, and took the oath in a voice almost inaudible.

"How ill he looks! But so elegant! . . . so distinguished! . . . what a dreadful position! . . . Imagine his feelings! . . . He will not look at the prisoner. . . . No wonder. . . . I hope the wretch will be punished!" were among the remarks to be heard, and most of them proceeded from ladies.

The Count did indeed keep his head studiously averted from Guido, and for the first few moments it was evident that his emotion nearly overpowered him. Those nearest to him noting his livid pallor, and the strange, hunted expression of his restless eyes, trembled lest he should be betrayed into one of his gusts of fury, or suffer a return of his distressing malady. But the marked sympathy of the President's bearing and the respectful compassion visible on the faces of the listeners, doubtless contributed to calm him, for little by little he resumed his natural manner.

His evidence in some intangible way—all the more effective for its very intangibility—was singularly hostile to Guido. And every word uttered by him gained a double meaning and a double force from that

sense of poetical justice in the crowd, which was gratified by the sight of the husband bearing witness against his wife's murderer.

Guido's poverty, his isolation, his social humility, the kindness of the Countess to him, the entire ignorance of the Count regarding him, the opportunities afforded him of learning the ways of the house and the habits of the family—all these points fell with the weight of molten lead upon the wax of each listener's receptiveness.

They looked at one another wondering how such wretches as the painter could live. Guido himself turned paler—struck dumb by the perception of the fatal web so subtly and invisibly woven round him.

"You are quite sure that you did not appoint the prisoner to call upon you on that evening?" asked the Judge, for the second time.

"Sure? Sir, have you not heard me swear it?" answered the Count with dignified simplicity.

"Can you remember having a conversation with the prisoner on any other subject than that of the frames?"

The Count reflected. "Yes," he said at last, slowly, as though remembering with some difficulty. "On the second day of my acquaintance with him, as I was accompanying him to the door, we passed through a gallery which my poor wife and I had had fitted up for pistol-shooting. I showed the prisoner how much more skilful the Countess was than myself, and I asked him casually if he knew how to shoot. He answered that he was a proficient."

"That is not true!" exclaimed Guido.

The interruption was so unexpected, general attention had been so rivetted on the Count, that everybody started. A strange shiver traversed Cioronski's frame, and his former agitated air returned.

"That is not true," firmly repeated Guido, who had risen to his feet.

"It is not your turn to speak yet," said the President coldly. "Nevertheless, proceed. What have you to say?"

"I told Count Cioronski that I had known a little how to shoot when a lad, but that I had not had a pistol in my hand for years and was completely out of practice."

Count Cioronski uttered no reply till requested to speak by the Judge. Then he made a deprecating gesture with his hand.

"I have no wish to bandy words," he answered. "My position is a painful one. I have told all I know."

"And you maintain your latest statement in the teeth of the prisoner's denial?"

"I do."

"Then," said Guido's clear vibrating tones, while he raised his right hand with a gesture of unconscious most dramatic force: "Then Count Cioronski lies!"

At these words a thrill of excitement ran through the audience, and a murmur compounded of derision, of rising sympathy, of incredulity,

and of surprise, betrayed how profound and how various was the effect produced.

The President rang his bell sharply to impose silence, and addressed himself anew to the witness. But Cioronski by this time was in a state of perturbation extraordinary to see.

"I have told you the truth!" he cried fiercely. "Why do you doubt me? Why do you look at me like that? Who is this man to be believed before me? I tell you he is a murderer. . . . He shot her. . . . He shall go to the galleys. . . . He ——"

His voice at the last words rose to a shriek. Choked with emotion, impelled by some blind passion of baffled longing, he raised his shaking hands above his head as though to hurl an imprecation at the petrified Court; then suddenly his strength failed him; a shiver of piteous weakness traversed his frame, and he burst into a storm of hysterical tears.

After that, it was of course impossible to question him further, and he was released in sheer pity.

The evidence of the medical experts which followed, seemed rather flat to the now highly-seasoned appetite of the audience.

They differed a good deal among themselves after the manner of experts, medical or otherwise, but agreed on the whole in affirming that the pistol must have been shot from a distance greater than five paces, for the wound had been a small, round orifice, with little or no appearance of contusion—such a wound, in short, as is generally produced at a certain distance and by a cool and deliberate aim.

The last witness of any great importance was Beppina. She had been in the group of listeners round Carlotta, who had heard Pietro Siccoli's revelations regarding the sapphire cross, and had been much surprised, she said, on repeating these to Angela to find that the blind woman was in total ignorance of any such present having been made by the Countess to her niece.

Lucia had indeed corroborated Guido's story as soon as she heard it. But the milliner was not slow to hint that in the opinion of the "neighbourhood" Lucia would be very likely to stretch a point when the object in view was to shield her supposed lover.

This closed the case for the prosecution.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VERDICT.

The usual attempt to prove an alibi had not been practicable in Guido's case, as by his own confession, after leaving the Countess's dwelling he had seen and spoken with nobody that he knew. Tempted by the beauty of the night he had strolled through the streets and returned to his lodgings only between ten and eleven o'clock.

It followed that the greater part of the testimony in his defence was

insignificant, and related principally to his mode of life and to the improbability suggested by his antecedents of his having committed a murder.

The people with whom Guiseppe Baroni had formerly lodged declared that Guido had testified an apparently genuine surprise on hearing that the old copyist had changed his abode, and then Lucia was called.

She had been sitting in the room reserved for witnesses, bearing as she could the twofold torture of the crawling hours and of her companions' inquisitive sympathy. Her mind was filled not so much with the thought of Guido as with one fixed vision of him. For six months she had not looked upon his face, and the absorbing desire to see him rendered her conscious but of his presence, as she entered the crowded court. Her eyes travelled straight to the dock and met his. What her long glance of unutterable yearning said, let those tell who have known the dagger-thrust of recognition caused by a beloved, familiar face seen once more after months of agony, and seen across the chasm set by suffering and by change!

Twice was she addressed before awaking with a start to a sense of her position. Then the recollection that she was there for Guido restored her to perception and to calm, and in her usual clear tones she answered the questions put to her. With the simplicity of perfect truth, she related all the facts of her acquaintance with Guido, and her introduction of him to the Countess.

The object of the prosecution, of course, was to invalidate her evidence by casting as much doubt as possible upon the purity of her relations with the painter, and to this end the interrogation plainly tended. Lucia's pale cheeks flushed painfully at the insulting inference of many of the questions, but her gentle self-possession remained unshaken, and the firmness of her answers on the subject of the sapphire cross produced its effect. Guido's counsel brightened visibly, and the Public Prosecutor interfered frequently to drive some point home.

"You consequently affirm," said the President, "that the prisoner, who was, you say, on no terms of peculiar intimacy with you, and who until a day or two before had been in a state of abject poverty, preferred to give you fifty francs out of his own pocket rather than pawn a jewel which you had given him for that purpose."

"I do affirm it," replied Lucia, steadily.

"Can you account in any way for such a choice on his part?"

For a moment she hesitated; then answered, "No."

"On no hypothesis?" persisted the Judge.

"On none," repeated Lucia, feeling all the impossibility of conveying to her interrogators the subtle essence of the motives which she felt had influenced Guido, and which her own womanly intuition had alone divined.

"You yourself are, or were, poor," continued the President. "And

yet you represent yourself as having been so careless of an object of value as to have heard with indifference that the pawn-ticket, which you supposed to have been given for it, was lost?"

"I did not care for the cross," answered Lucia.

"You must be singularly disinterested."

She made no reply.

"And you declare that you never even suspected this unaccountable act of generosity on the prisoner's part until you heard the explanation which he gave to Pietro Siccoli of his possession of the cross?"

"I declare it most solemnly."

"Are you quite sure," resumed the Judge, with an added blandness of cynicism, "that this explanation of the prisoner's did not suggest to you the whole of the story which you have just related?"

"You have called me that I might tell the truth, I believe," answered Lucia; and, for the first time, a sparkle of indignant scorn shone for an instant in her eyes.

The President changed his ground. "Is it true that you engaged the counsel for the prisoner's defence?"

"It is quite true."

"With his consent?"

"Without his consent, and without his knowledge."

"Remember, you have asserted most positively that the prisoner stood to you in the relation of a mere acquaintance," the President remarked warningly.

Lucia clasped her hands with a nervous movement of distress. It was curiously characteristic of her absolute self-forgetfulness that never until that moment had she asked herself how Guido might regard her generous interest in his fate. Now, when called upon to justify that interest, the knowledge of the wasted form behind the iron bars was far more intolerable to her than the cruel cross-examination or the pitiless curiosity of the crowd.

"It is true he was nothing to me," she said, in low tones. "Nothing but a neighbour, with whose struggles I was acquainted and whose misery I had seen."

Her eyes filled with tears. Blessed misery! happy struggles! where were they now?

"It is a very unusual action to oblige, unsought, a person whose only claim upon one's sympathy is an accident of neighbourhood," observed the Judge.

"Perhaps it is unusual," said Lucia, simply. "I never thought of that."

The President felt the perfect good faith of this answer to be dangerously telling, and summoned a fresh supply of irony to overwhelm it.

"Am I to conclude that you are animated with feelings of disinterested benevolence towards every poor and struggling young man of your acquaintance?" he asked suavely.

A malicious titter ran through the audience, and all the latent fire of Lucia's nature sprang into flame. "Ah!" she cried impetuously, "the rich and the happy, how can they know the pity of the poor for one another?" She paused for one instant before the sudden rush of thoughts long felt but until now felt formlessly and mutely. Then while the colour mounted to her delicate face, she resumed in low, vehement tones of inspiration: "Gifts may give us softer beds, and less scanty food. They may deprive cold and want and desolation of a portion of their sting; but they cannot give us joy, or hope; they cannot lessen the years of waiting for a success that never comes, or lighten the burden of frustrated endeavour; or sweeten the bitterness of a wasted youth. We—we who feel them—alone can know what monotony and weariness of soul may add to the anguish of the poor."

The effect of these words, poured forth with such unstudied ardour, was simply electrical. The moment before Lucia had excited only curiosity, piquantly flavoured by evil suggestion; now she had won everything that was best and highest in the sympathies of her listeners. On their faces shone the light of an enthusiasm reflected from hers; a burst of applause greeted her concluding phrase, and in not a few eyes sparkled generous tears.

"We require evidence as to the prisoner from you, not social theories," said the President sharply, as soon as he could make himself heard; but this time his sarcasm found no echo of amusement. On the contrary there was that inarticulate murmur of comment in the Court which testifies to excited public feeling. The tide of emotion had completely turned in Guido's favour. Lucia's simplest answers appeared to have gained a new significance, and the mere tones of her voice seemed to go straight to the hearts of those who heard her.

In vain the President rang his bell, and the little usher furiously shouted "Silenzio;" the examination proceeded amidst outbreaks of illogical derision and unreasoning applause, and the Court had to be cleared at last, and an interval of half an hour elapsed before the public was readmitted to hear the Royal Procurator's speech.

That exalted functionary rose to begin his charge in the very worst of tempers. He hated scenes at all times, and the late scene had been of a nature peculiarly to exasperate him. He was known to make his pride and boast of the fact that he had obtained more condemnations than any Public Prosecutor of his nation, and his day. He was not eloquent, for eloquence in a fiery sense is not an attribute of his office, but he was master of a particular kind of frigid sarcasm, that withered the pity and almost paralysed the justice of a jury.

Very dexterously now did he begin his speech. Coldly alluding to the enthusiasm just displayed by the audience, he treated it as a mere hysterical efflorescence, which a little intelligent analysis of the evidence must soon destroy. He was, he said, far too well acquainted with the

keen comprehension and the lofty impartiality of the jury to suppose for one moment that *they* would catch the infection of such unreasoning ardour. In this way he immediately brought round the more critical among his hearers—that is to say, the large number of people in every audience who never can bear to be considered deficient in common sense. The excited murmur of sympathy with Guido was quickly succeeded by an ominous silence, as under the influence of the lawyer's icy phrases, the circle of incredulity slowly but surely widened. Very soon there was hardly anybody but felt a little ashamed of having momentarily believed in the prisoner. Only Lucia and old Guiseppe Baroni drew closer together, and looked into each other's faces with consternated eyes.

"What could be clearer than the meaning of the evidence?" asked the Public Prosecutor, not challenging doubt by assertion, but speaking with a kind of languid impartiality. "Short of having taken the murderer red-handed, no certainty of guilt could be more absolute. The prisoner had not even been able to give an ordinary plausible account of himself. What could be more clumsy than his pretence of having forgotten Guiseppe Baroni's change of house? What more futile than his pretext of having called to speak to the Count about frames that nobody had ever ordered or even wanted? Who more likely to meditate such a theft than he? Misery, failure, and want are desperate counsellors, and the prisoner was on the verge of starvation. Who would more easily be precipitated from theft into murder on detection? He was young, impetuous, a native of a province where the blood is hot, and where men are notoriously regardless of the value of life."

All the evidence adduced against the prisoner had been positive, while all that in his favour, with one apparent exception, had been negatived. And by whom was this apparent exception made? By a woman who had not even cared to conceal her partiality. And what, after all, had she had to state? Circumstances currently reported an hour after the prisoner's arrest. Nothing was easier for anybody than to construct out of common gossip an explanation after the fact. And how wild her tale must appear when it was considered that she did not even attempt to explain why the prisoner should have kept the cross! There was no need surely to point out to the Court the extreme improbability of a half-starved painter having fifty francs to throw away upon a whim, and a whim it certainly would have been to keep a jewel for which he had no earthly use. Add to this first improbability the extreme unlikelihood of Lucia's having contented herself with the story of the lost pawn-ticket. Was it not on the face of it absurd to suppose that a struggling embroideress would hear with calm indifference of the loss of a ticket representing a jewel of no mean value? Was it not much more probable that the jewel had never been hers, and the whole story of its belonging to her had been invented by the prisoner

to satisfy Pietro Siccoli's curiosity, and corroborated later by Lucia to save her accused lover?

All this and much more did the Public Prosecutor say, in his dry, monotonous tones, with his placid, steely glance; and as he spoke hope and enthusiasm dropped away, truth itself was dwarfed, and nothing stood erect but the bare and pitiless array of damning facts. When the cold voice ceased at last and the accuser sat down, Lucia's face resembled a mask of marble despair, and old Baroni had dropped his head upon his folded arms and was sobbing like a child.

It was the turn now of Guido's counsel, Signor Lorenzo Bigatti, or Signor Renzo, as, with Italian love of abbreviation, he was generally called.

He was very clever, but he was young, and an older lawyer than he might have been excused for feeling some nervousness on such an occasion.

For Signor Renzo had been engaged for the defence at the very last moment, and scant time had been accorded him in which to consider all the facts. He was a generous youth, with a fiery and brilliant imagination, and later became celebrated as an impassioned special pleader. But though remarkable for flashes of insight, he did not excel in the passionless dissection and subtle arrangement of evidence. With the instinct of his particular superiority, he contented himself with hammering at the weakest point of the prosecution, viz., the total disappearance of all the articles supposed to have been stolen, except the sapphire cross. Pointing out forcibly how much this one circumstance lent colouring and probability to Lucia's story, he passed to what was really a glowing defence of *her*. It was evident that the girl's purity and ardent devotion had seized hold of Signor Renzo's chivalrous fancy. The fervour with which he rebutted every doubt that had been cast upon the nature of her relations with the painter did at last revive some faint flame of belief in his hearers; but unfortunately the audience were suffering from the reaction of their own late enthusiasm. The young lawyer's appeal stirred them but feebly after all, and he sat down at last with a mortifying sense of failure. In an atmosphere so unelectrical there was but a small chance of the jury catching the infection of pity.

The right of speaking last belonged to the Public Prosecutor. He observed that the disappearance of most of the abstracted jewels was a fact which would have been more significant were it not so common. There probably never was a thief yet who had not friends or accomplices to whom he could confide his spoils, and who escaped detection. The accused man's counsel had pertinently remarked that if the prisoner had indeed stolen the jewels and then given them to an accomplice he was very unlikely to have kept back the sapphire cross. But this the Public Prosecutor regarded as a mere accident. The prisoner had evidently seized the whole glittering contents of the porcelain tray, and had doubtless stuffed them pell-mell into his

pockets. He must have parted with them the same night, probably within the same hour. What was more likely than that in his hurry and confusion of mind he should momentarily have overlooked the sapphire cross? The Public Prosecutor reminded the Court of the embarrassment which Guido had betrayed when Pietro Siccoli found the cross; he recapitulated all the evidence point by point; he laid especial stress upon the fact, strange as he declared it, that Lucia had never mentioned to her aunt the supposed gift from the Countess to her of a valuable and beautiful jewel; and he concluded suddenly by calling upon the jury, in the name of justice and common sense, to inflict upon Guido Zondara the full punishment of the Tuscan law for murder—in other words, the galleys for life.

The brief winter day had long drawn to a close, when the jury withdrew to consider their verdict. Before they returned the audience had greatly thinned: most people had gone home to dinner. The really interesting part of the trial was over. Where was the use of waiting for the verdict? The evening papers would have that.

The lawyers shuffled their notes; the President went comfortably to sleep on his bench; Beppina and Angela stirred up the live cinders in their little earthen pots of braize, and carried on a whispered conversation with the fat usher.

In Lucia every feeling was distilled to one exquisite agony of suspense. Mechanically she still kept her eyes fixed on the dock, from which, however, Guido, according to the practice of Italian courts, had been removed.

The jury returned. Silently the twelve took their places; the President roused himself; even his mute colleagues showed some amœba-like signs of animation. The usual questions were put. Was Guido Zondara a thief? Was he a murderer? To each the answer was "Yes," and then the foreman announced that in consideration of the prisoner's youth the punishment recommended by the jury was—twenty years' hard labour.

Lucia started as if shot when the carabineers brought back Guido to receive his sentence after the jury had delivered their verdict.

"It is really better than I hoped. It is *your* evidence that has done it. And we can appeal. We ——"

Signor Renzo was speaking rapidly, ardently, but he suddenly ceased. Lucia raised her eyes to his face, and every emotion but pity died down in the young lawyer's generous heart before that glance of unutterable despair!

CHAPTER VII.

SIGNOR RENZO.

"It's all very well for *you* to talk, Beppina. Propriety here, propriety there. You know just as much about it as you do of the patience of the saints. Of course Lucia and I went to see the poor

lad in prison, and we shall go again. *We* don't desert our friends in trouble, murderers or no murderers."

"And I daresay Signor Guido was very much obliged to you," replied Beppina, spitefully. "At the same time I think it is a pity the whole neighbourhood should say that Lucia is engaged to a condemned murderer."

"Guido is not a murderer, but the neighbourhood is quite right in saying that I am engaged to him," said Lucia, quietly, raising her wan face from her work.

Angela nudged Beppina confidentially. "Zitta! don't answer her. She will get over it in time, you know. But just now it is no use talking," whispered the blind woman.

"Twenty years is a long while to be engaged," giggled Beppina. "And the sposo away, too! It's worse than having none at all."

"Lucia could marry to-morrow if she liked," remarked Angela, loftily. "But if she does not choose to take a husband, what business is that of anybody?"

"Oh, none at all, of course," said Beppina. "But come, Lucia, you are not serious, are you? You might as well become a nun at once."

"I would rather not talk about it at all, if you please," replied Lucia, gently.

A nun? What renunciation ever made behind a cloister's walls was more perfect than that sealed by her in the noisome prison with a kiss on Guido's pallid lips? Before her mental vision now stretched the gray vista of hopeless years. With the keen prescience of pain she saw the frozen dawns when her bleeding heart would follow him upon his shameful task; she felt the anguished awakening in dream-haunted nights, and knew the lustre to her for ever shadowed, the sweetness to her for ever poisoned of the remorseless southern noons.

"She is quiet enough, after all," remarked her neighbours, who did not know the depth of the tomb in which one great grief can bury all the smaller worries and all the trivial cares of ordinary life.

But if Lucia was quiet, so much could not be said of Signor Renzo. In him all the chivalry of a young man, and all the vanity of a young lawyer, rose to do battle for Guido. Lucia's despair touched his heart, and the sentence of the Court wounded his pride. He felt that he had not been able to do justice either to Guido or to himself. He had the conviction that the painter was innocent, and yet he had failed altogether, not simply to establish the fact, but even to transport it into the regions of probability. This was primarily the fault of the evidence. What if Signor Renzo could bring to light such new truths as would result not only in the technical reversal of the verdict, but in the triumphant vindication of Guido?

He grew quite excited at the bare idea; and after a day or two

spent in meditation he went to call upon Lucia. Fortunately she was alone.

"You must not fret," said the lawyer kindly, as he looked at her pale cheeks and the dark circles under her eyes. "I feel sure all will come right in the end. But we must find somebody else to accuse."

"And whom?" said Lucia, despairingly. "You know how in the first investigation nothing could be discovered against the servants."

"True. But the servants must have had friends or acquaintances coming constantly to the house. My impression is that the law was thrown off the right track in the very first instance by Count Cioronski's own apparent conviction of Guido's guilt. You know how damning his evidence was in Court. I hear that it was, if possible, even stronger before the Judge of Instruction. And in Court he would, of course, have added much more but for his crazy fit of excitement."

"But why should he have made up his mind that Guido was guilty?"

"Who knows?" Signor Renzo shrugged his shoulders. "Madness (he is half demented evidently), caprice, jealousy even. Was he jealous, do you think?" asked the lawyer, sharply.

"I don't know." Lucia turned deadly pale. The thought was torture—for all her faith in Guido.

"You see," said Signor Renzo, "the strongest point against Guido is his presence in the house at that particular moment, combined with his fatal forgetfulness in regard to old Baroni's change of residence. The theory of the prosecution is that he had gone to the Countess's apartment with some plan, probably not very definite, of robbery, or perhaps only with the idea of obtaining money from her. Disappointed of seeing her at first, he had lingered about the stairs until he heard, or saw, Carlotta descend. Then he entered, found the rooms deserted, the Countess asleep, and saw the jewels on the table. The temptation was overpowering; he took them. The Countess suddenly roused, started up, and the thief shot her to avoid detection."

"So that you suppose him to have committed a second crime to escape from the consequences of the first?" exclaimed Lucia, half indignantly.

"Cara mia! if criminals were always cool headed and always logical, I assure you we should have very few interesting trials," answered Signor Renzo. "This, as I tell you, is the theory of the prosecution. To destroy it we must substitute another theory for it: in other words, find another assassin. Now you were a good deal at the Countess's. Were there any miserable, half-starved hangers-on of the servants, who would be likely to learn the habits of the household, and be able, consequently, to choose the best moment for a robbery?"

Lucia shook her head sadly. She could think of nobody of the kind.

"Supposing there to have been such a person," continued Signor Renzo, "he must either have been lurking about the stairs for some time before committing the deed, or he must have entered the house by the deaf porter's lodge after Carlotta descended, or he must have been concealed in the apartment. If he had been lurking about the stairs, Guido himself, in all probability, would have seen him, nor could he have failed to mention a fact so much in his own favour. If he were concealed in the apartment one would be led to suspect the connivance of the servants. But against them, as you yourself have just said, the preliminary inquiry elicited absolutely nothing. There remains the third hypothesis, that the thief entered the house after the maid had left the ante-chamber."

Lucia sighed wearily. This nameless, invisible, intangible murderer—who could he be?

"He might have been anybody," resumed the lawyer, unconsciously answering her thought. "Some abject wretch, half-meditating a crime as an escape from starvation, who, seeing an open door, entered, and tempted, succumbed." Signor Renzo rose, and perplexed, took a turn or two about the room. "The Countess was almost recklessly benevolent, I have heard," he went on. "I suppose there were all sorts of poor creatures who went to her for relief?"

"All sorts." Lucia gave a faint, sad smile of recollection, as she remembered how the people had thronged to the beautiful Countess's dwelling as to some miraculous shrine.

"And, of course, it would be in this particular neighbourhood where she lived on the outskirts of such a seething mass of poverty, that her reputation for charity was greatest?"

"Yes," said Lucia, "everybody went to her until the Count interfered. And to the last she was very, *very* kind."

"Humph!" Signor Renzo grew more and more meditative. "You know of no unusually miserable creature living hereabouts, who showed any special agitation on hearing of the murder, or behaved in any way strangely?"

Again she shook her head.

"Nobody left the neighbourhood rather suddenly?" persisted the lawyer.

"Ah!" cried Lucia, and clasped her hands in a positive spasm of remembrance. "*Tito!*"

"Tito?" Signor Renzo took a chair and dropped into it in front of her. "And who is Tito?"

But already Lucia was remorseful. "It is impossible," she said. "Do not ask me to suspect him."

"Tell! tell!" urged her companion excitedly. "Never mind who he is. I would suspect the Judge on the Bench, now, rather than Guido."

Thus entreated, reluctantly, with many protests, she told how on the very evening of the murder Isoletta had been ill, how Tito, desperate, had gone out to get money, and had returned in about an hour apparently with a good deal.

"And you say that the interval of his absence corresponded as nearly as possible to the time of the murder?"

"Yes."

"And what has become of him?"

"He is living at Pistoja, I hear. He left this a very few days after the murder."

"Suddenly?"

"Quite suddenly."

"And yet nobody ever thought of connecting his departure with the murder!" exclaimed Signor Renzo.

"In all that excitement I think his going attracted no attention," said Lucia.

"And what is he doing at Pistoja, do you know?"

"Working at his trade as a carpenter."

"Prosperously?"

"Very prosperously, I believe. Somebody even said that he had opened a shop."

"I am always suspicious of ne'er-do-weels who are suddenly found in easy circumstances. But what I do not understand is how, supposing him to be our man, he could so quickly have converted the jewels into money. Who were his associates? Oh, Internationalists! I would believe any harm of *them*," said the prejudiced lawyer. He relapsed into musing. "I am afraid it is not very much of a clue, after all," he presently continued. "Nay, don't lose heart, Signora Lucia! It is a starting point if it is nothing else. You must leave me to think it all over. Meanwhile, I know that I need not entreat you to be silent. The least hint would ruin everything. You shall hear from me in a few days. Good-bye."

"I am very grateful," said Lucia, with her modest grace.

Signor Renzo, bowing with an involuntary reverence over her outstretched hand, muttered something not very clear about his duty and the cause of justice. But as he walked home the young lawyer caught himself wondering more than once wherein lay the nameless charm of this proud but gentle maiden of the people. Certain it is that she played a far more prominent part in his meditations than the austere goddess of the Sword and Scales.

(*To be concluded.*)

PLEASURE AND SORROW.

I READ within an ancient book one day
  Quaint lore that well beguiled my hour of leisure,
And in its yellow pages chanced to stray
  Upon a legend of the Goddess Pleasure.

That wayward nymph, escaping, it would seem,
  The crowd of zealous courtiers who had sought her,
Had wandered to the margin of a stream,
  And here to bathe her rosy limbs bethought her.

So by the covert side her clothes she laid,
  And loosed her sandals, never once discerning
How pallid Sorrow lingered in the shade,
  A pair of envious eyes upon her turning:

Who, when she sported in the wave anon,
  Drawing anear with furtive glances eager,
The dainty garments stole, and put them on
  To shroud her form, and veil her visage meagre.

And thus disguised pale Sorrow went her way,
  And thus befooled, men rashly thronged around her,
And seeking only Pleasure day by day,
  At last too surely only Sorrow found her.

The volume slipped unheeded from my knee,
  As on the simple tale awhile I pondered,
For many times since then it seems to me
  Sorrow in Pleasure's stolen garb has wandered.

And some she tempts with wealth, and some with wine,
  To follow where she leads, but on the morrow,
Though in the chase they deemed her half divine,
  The face that mocks them is the face of Sorrow.

True pleasure lives not here, and he to whom
  An earnest of her presence shall be given,
Must learn in time to look beyond the tomb,
  And train his thoughts that they may rise to Heaven.

SYDNEY GREY.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

By Narissa Rosavo.

FRANCE assumed no black garb for the gallant boy born in her purple, yet doomed never to wear a crown; but, long years since, in the days of Mirabeau—that esprit-fort, beautiful through his excess of ugliness—on the eve of the first French Republic, a three days' mourning was voted by acclamation on the death of the youngest son in a family of seventeen children, all the progeny of a poor, hard-working New England emigrant dyer and soap boiler. How true we often find that utterance, "The first shall be last and the last first!"

Benjamin Franklin died in his eighty-fifth year. Few, indeed, would willingly undertake to retrace all the steps of so long an earthly pilgrimage, but that is what the subject of this sketch desired to do just before the final scene. "All I would ask should be the privilege of an author, to correct, in a second edition, certain errors of the first. Were this, however, denied me, *still would I not decline the offer!*"

Benjamin was, as a boy, sturdy, masterful, and impatient; but so quick to learn some things that reading seemed to come by instinct, although all arithmetic was apparently beyond his powers. His father resolved to make a chaplain of his youngest son. He was encouraged to do this by his brother, who followed Josiah from England to America, and aided him in business.

This uncle was the boy's godfather, and of a preaching turn himself. He had written a volume of sermons, in shorthand of his own invention, and promised this book, hereafter, to his godson if he would trouble to learn how to read the crabbed characters. Benjamin was as eager over the matter as King Alfred had been on a similar occasion. He succeeded, but soon forgot them again, as his father quickly found the expenses of keeping the boy at school, to say nothing of the future college he should attend, were quite beyond him. The plan was relinquished. Josiah told his little son he was not good enough to be made a parson of. Benjamin was guilty of chafing over long prayers and the very lengthy graces said before and after meals. When the frugal family stores were being laid in for a season, he had once wickedly, though very gravely, entreated of his father to come and bless them wholesale, so that the frequent retail supplications and thanksgivings might be done away with. It is easy to imagine how such utter depravity was lectured in a nonconformist family. The culprit confessed he was not good enough for home life. He wanted badly to go and be a sailor. This was

turning the tables on his parents with a vengeance. They took him back into favour, and perhaps even shortened the prayers.

He was now to learn his father's trade; and he filled moulds, cut wicks, and ran on messages for a time, but he hated it all; books, books, books, it was those he longed to be over. There was another rebellion. The patient father still turned a deaf ear to all talk of the sea, but he took his son by turns to observe and study the trade of every artisan in Boston where they lived, hoping Benjamin would betray aptitude or liking for some one of them. He rejected all as a permanent employment, but learned much, as was ever his custom, wherever he went. And the power he now acquired of handling tools, hereafter, when he was busy experimenting upon his discourse concerning the identity of lightning and electricity, proved most valuable.

Meantime Josiah Franklin and Abiah his wife were despairing of him. Their eldest son was established as a printer in the city, and was now publishing the *Boston Courant*, one of the two only papers then appearing in America; and that was one too many, as most people thought. After much persuasion Benjamin, at twelve years of age, consented to sign indentures binding himself apprentice for nine years to his brother. He was to receive no wages until eight of them had expired.

The bait of, at least, helping to make books tempted him here, but the connection was not a happy one. James was hard and tyrannical as a master, and the father was continually called in to settle disputes. As his judgment usually supported his youngest son's cause, his interference rather made matters worse.

There was, no doubt, much jealousy in the elder's mind of his brother. He had called in an ally and found this boy apprentice more powerful than himself. Benjamin learned his business as a printer rapidly and thoroughly. He gathered information on all sides, sitting up at night to read every book he could borrow or obtain possession of. The few he had of his own he used to exchange when mastered.

He fell upon the poets, and resolved to be one himself. He wrote some doggerel ballads on recent topics then under discussion. James, who was never above turning a penny, printed them, and sent the boy selling them about the streets. They sold well, and Benjamin was growing puffed with vanity, and certain of possessing the divine aflatus, when his sensible father took him in hand, and showed him all the ridiculousness of his very weak compositions.

Benjamin forsook poetry, and took to prose writing. Here again his father proved his best friend. A voluminous correspondence of the youth with a clever friend named Collins came into his hands. He pointed out all the faults of style, and the superiority of Collins' letters. Mortified, but resolute for his own improvement, the boy, now about fourteen, used every endeavour to amend, and with such

good success that articles slipped by him, anonymously, under the door of his brother's office, were eagerly published in the *Courant*, and much praised by the public.

A little later James fell into trouble with the Government, and was imprisoned for a month, and on his release was forbidden to continue his paper. Benjamin had carried it on with exceptional success during his absence. After much consultation with friends, it was now thought that the best and only plan was to release the boy from his indentures, so far as the public were concerned, and to allow him to remain the nominal editor and owner.

This was done, but a secret paper was drawn up by James, binding his brother, now sixteen years of age, as closely as ever. This was, of course, not legal or for the world's eye; but, having been seduced into signing it, Benjamin, ever after, mourned over the course he shortly took. Herein he seems to have stretched honour and honesty beyond their limits. He was treated without regard to either. Although now, virtually, master of the position, the youth was still treated like a slave. He had no wages, and must put up, not only with constant, hard words, but should also endure blows, and never seek to retaliate.

At length, when one scene worse than usual had taken place, Benjamin fled away by night, and left James for ever, his friend Collins helping him to escape.

He went first to New York, and on the voyage thither the sailors caught a fine cod, and cooked it for their dinners. They offered the runaway apprentice a share. Benjamin, some years before this, had read a book advocating abstinence from all animal food, on the ground that each slaughter was little better than a murder. The young disciple had been since then a strict vegetarian, and his health did not suffer then or throughout his life whenever he again adopted such spare food. Perhaps it rather benefited, as it undoubtedly did, from his strict and continuous temperance. But on this occasion the lad was very hungry, and the cod smelt very nice. On consideration he remembered noticing that the fish, when opened, was found to contain other lesser fish. He argued that this particular cod, at any rate, had merited death, and he ate a hearty meal off it.

From New York Franklin went on to Philadelphia, in search of work. Here he landed, tired, dirty, and almost penniless—a stranger in a strange land. Hunger pinched so hard that he hastened to buy some bread, which he ate eagerly as he went along the streets. A portly young girl observed him, and smiled. He blushed, and turned aside. Her name was Read, and she was destined to be his future wife, although each should first live through many and strange vicissitudes.

A good workman usually finds employment, and a worthy youth is apt to make friends. Franklin was soon supplied with both: of the latter, then and later, he gained perhaps too many. A chance,

or what is called such, drew on him the notice of Sir William Keith, the provincial governor, who henceforward paid him much attention, even going so far as to invite him often to his house to dinner parties.

This went fair to turn the lad's head, and made his new master, a printer named Keimer, exceedingly jealous. Sir William depreciated this man, and urged Benjamin to set up a printing office on his own score, promising to support it. The boy, for he was still only seventeen, spoke of his youth, and lack of sufficient means; but all obstacles were cried down. The governor loved popularity and new objects of patronage, and was given to promising everything and doing nothing of what he engaged to do; but Benjamin had to live a good while longer before he learned to estimate this new friend at his real worth.

He, at length, allowed himself to be talked into returning to Boston, to ask his father to help him in setting up alone in business, taking with him a very flattering letter from Sir William. Perhaps he was, in any case, glad of an excuse for seeing once more the dear home people, for news of which he had vainly pined now for nine months. He obtained a holiday, therefore, from Keimer, without betraying his projects; took leave of Miss Read, into whose father's house his present master had sent him to lodge, and set forth, dressed in his best suit, with a good horse to ride, a watch in one pocket and some money to jingle in another; altogether a new individual, so far as externals went, from the runaway "'prentice" of last year.

As he travelled homewards he tells of all the wearisome delays he had at each inn from the curiosity of the inhabitants. At length he composed a short biography for such occasions, and his first proceeding henceforth was to summon all—master, mistress, children and servants—to assemble and listen, while he addressed them thus: "Good people, I am Benjamin Franklin, printer by trade, still a youth. I have relations in Boston, whither I journey on business. I shall remain there but a short time, and shall then return to my duties, as a wise man should. This is all I can tell you, and I therefore beg of you now to have pity on me, and attend as quickly as you can to my wants, and to those of my horse."

Franklin's appearance in Boston created quite a sensation, when backed up by his accounts of his prosperous life in Philadelphia. His brother James turned green with envy and white with rage. His friend Collins straightway threw up his good clerkship, and not waiting even to return with Benjamin, preceded him as far as New York. Here, while lingering idly, he fell into habits of intemperance, and lived henceforth but to be a burden to himself and a thorn in the side of Franklin. From that time he became a confirmed drunkard. He involved his friend in a debt which entangled him in trouble for years.

Josiah and Abiah Franklin wept over and blessed their prodigal,

and eagerly listened to his news. But the father shook his head over the new projects, and even over the Governor's letter, much as it pleased and gratified him to know that his Benjamin was esteemed, and worthy of it. He considered his son too young. When he was of age, four years hence, he promised to help him to set up business if he possibly could then command the necessary money.

With this pledge Franklin returned to Philadelphia, and would have been content had Sir William allowed. But Sir William did not. He kept the project ever on the tapis, urged Benjamin much now to go over to London and choose his printing press, promising, if he did so, to go security himself for all the necessary expenses.

At length the boy took him at his word, and engaged his passage in the next vessel. Tears and vows were exchanged between him and Miss Read, his trunk was packed, also that of a new fidus achates, a worthless poet named Ralph. This man was destined to be even more troublesome and expensive a friend than Collins had proved.

Sir William Keith was also to give Franklin several good letters of introduction. There were, however, the most unaccountable delays about these and the letter of credit. Benjamin had at length to go on board without them. They were to be sent after him, before the vessel started. He never got them, one way or another. The Governor was tired of his protégé, and had played his game as far as he meant to go.

Years afterwards, when they met again, each looked aside, equally unwilling to speak, although from different causes.

Meantime, poor Franklin was in much the same plight on reaching London as when he first entered Philadelphia. In place of improving his condition, he was now poorer than ever.

Amid all the difficulties and troubles of the next five years of hard work he allowed himself to forget his true love, or at any rate he neglected to keep up a correspondence. He wrote once, at the height of his bitter disappointment, to say that he could not possibly return to America for very long; after that he wrote no more, committing thus, as he says, the greatest error of his life.

Miss Read's parents forced her into a loveless marriage. Her husband turned out bad and unkind, and the pair soon separated, he going to the West Indies, where report said he shortly died. It was not, however, possible to ascertain his death as a fact. When Franklin at length returned she was neither maid, wife, nor well-authenticated widow. Still the old love was stronger than ever on reunion, and, after much doubting, they risked all, and were married. He was nearly as poor as on the first day she saw him, but, by degrees, their steady industry and rigid economy was rewarded by an ever increasing tide of prosperity.

The happy wife felt it a gala day indeed when, by long accumulated small savings, she was able to surprise her husband one morning with a china cup and a silver spoon from which to take his breakfast.

Franklin was shocked. "You see how luxury creeps into families in spite of principles," he says. When his meal was over he went to the store, and rolled home a wheelbarrow full of papers through the streets with his own hands, lest folk should get wind of the china cup, and say he was above his business. Mrs. Franklin put the new possessions by on a high shelf, smiled at them, and then set about her daily task of stitching the fresh printed sheets.

At this time Franklin was working hard after moral perfection.

Slowly but surely they rose to wealth and honour. By-and-by, when troubles arose with the mother country, Franklin was sent to and fro on political missions, which he transacted, invariably, with miraculous judgment and prudence. He hoped against hope for a peaceable settlement, until the day came when his old Boston friends tossed a ship-load of good tea under the waves, sooner than pay the tax on it.

Then came an outcry in the General Assembly, of which Franklin was now an honoured member, for the passing of a law forbidding Episcopalians in America to pray for the King. Foreseeing fresh troubles out of this, and small advantage, Benjamin, with grim humour, diverted the danger by suggesting that to his certain knowledge those good people had besieged Heaven these twenty-three years with entreaties to grant him and his ministers wisdom. "Now, we all know," he concluded, "that they have not been heard. It is clear, therefore, they have no credit in that Court."

The laugh that followed put an end to the motion.

By this time Franklin had been granted a large income, in acknowledgment of his public services. He spent it, and his hardly earned private fortune nobly, ever seeking to benefit mankind by all possible means. The States owed their first hospital to him. He established useful clubs, colleges, libraries, &c.

From the date of his scientific discoveries honours were literally showered on him, at home and abroad. In France his theories attracted special notice. His experiments were frequently displayed before large crowds of interested spectators. On one occasion the unfortunate expositor became a martyr to the cause of science, being killed by the electric force he drew upon him from the clouds.

Later on, when Franklin was in Paris as an envoy, seeking an alliance, offensive and defensive, with France for his country against England, the old philosopher was the most popular man in the city, although his mission was but coldly and cautiously considered. He was received well at Court. Magnificent fêtes were given in his honour. The fairest among three hundred lovely women was chosen for the honour of placing a crown of laurel on the old man's head, and of imprinting two kisses on his withered cheeks, such as Mr. Punch himself might have despaired of receiving.

Those were the days of supreme art and splendour in dress, of wigs and powder, of highest elegance of manner, and of most polished

address. Knowing all this, and comprehending well that an old American, nearly eighty years of age, and "of the people," could not compete with nobles and princes in the most cultivated metropolis of Christendom, on landing in France he laid aside his respectable wig and customary clothes, and adopted a style of his own, from which he never varied, and which made him truly the most remarkable man in the country. He wore his own white locks, and over them a round brimmed hat. He was dressed in brown, carried a white stick, and was never seen without spectacles. His years, his simplicity, his dignity, were his only ornaments, and they became him well.

He was detained long in Paris; so long that his noble old figure became a familiar one in the streets; so long that he pined for home, and entreated to be recalled. But at length he accomplished what, perhaps, none other could have done—the object of his journey.

The enthusiasm of his reception, on his return, was unequalled. Salutes thundered a welcome, bells rang him home, loving hearts throbbed to meet him, proud arms carried him through the streets, every voice blessed him, and every hand longed to clasp his.

A few more scenes, and then came the last of all, and with it the use for his epitaph, written more than sixty years before by himself, and found amongst his papers:—"The body of Benjamin Franklin, printer (like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out, and stripped of its lettering and gilding), lies here, food for worms; yet the work itself shall not be lost, but it will (as he believed) appear once more, in a new and more beautiful edition, corrected and amended by the AUTHOR."

SECRET AS THE GRAVE.

A Biography. A.D. 1665—1723.

By C. J. LANGSTON.

I.

THE times were out of joint. "If one look unto the land behold darkness and sorrow." A treacherous debauchee sat on the throne, "false, fleeting, perjured;" leering with bleared eyes at everything pure and good. That leer was taken up by the courtiers and passed on to the commonalty of the realm. Perish all virtue, freedom of thought, and worship; but, God save the King. The nation was drunk, but not with wine; drunk with excess of liberty to work its own sweet will, and with the licence to do everything save establish a conventicle, or contravene the Thirty-nine Articles. One prophet there was—a Samson who shook the temple of Mammon, and the light of whose eyes had been quenched in manhood, but whose fiery soul burned in the dark. He lifted his still beautiful orbs to heaven and uttered a parable against the backsliding of the age; then dying, poured out his soul in undying song.

Another voice was at hand to cry aloud and spare not, even with the trumpet of the Archangel. It needed not the despairing shriek of the fanatic along her streets, "There is wrath gone out from the Lord, the plague is begun." For, in the modern Babylon people were hurrying to and fro, silent and far apart; and at intervals there appeared written on the wall, like the "Mene mene" of old, the awful sentence, "Lord, have mercy upon us," encircling the image of the cross. Truly the times were out of joint in 1665.

There was brought to a quiet country church for baptism "Edward, infant son of Thomas and Margaret B——, of Mersham, Gent." No venerable font lent its hoary sanction to the sacred rite, for two years afterwards occurs the entry in the Parish Book, "Payd Master Gower and Mason Epps ye sum of one shilling and ninepence for bringing ye auld font from the Lodge forstall. Repayring ye same at ye base, eightpence."

The parents of Edward were fairly well to do, having an estate of seven hundred acres or more, and living in a picturesque manor house, now divided into cottages, but little altered during the last two hundred years. It is a high-roofed, half-timbered dwelling of a style frequently seen in Kent, the first floor projecting on stout oak joists, and having odd corners covered with ivy, with broad-based chimneys, suggestive of secret chambers, and an old-fashioned garden, overrun with simple flowers and herbs, such as Shakespeare speaks of, and where many a Puritan posy has been gathered. Even now the sweet

scent of the lavender and the moss-rose comes back to me like the breath of a purer life from the Eden of childhood, and I sigh to think how soon all the dear earthly flowers have faded for evermore. The ground rises to the north and west, and a long stretch of moorland widens to the south, through which passes a sluggish stream, formerly the haunt of the bustard and the snipe.

At the time of which I write, Thomas B——, Gent., had been obliged to part with some of his broad acres. Whilst yet a lad of sixteen he had accompanied his father, an old Royalist, to the wars, and the estate was deeply mortgaged in the King's service; but there still remained a moiety sufficient to enable him to sleep in the ancestral home, and to send his eldest son, Edward, to the University. "He cannot thrust his way with the sword," said Mr. Thomas B—— to a neighbour, "for in these dangerous days no man knows his enemy; little heed is taken to my suit at Court; therefore the lad must be content with this small patrimony and his uncle's promise of preferment."

"Walk circumspectly, and remember her that bare you," observed his mother, the stately Margaret, as young Edward mounted his horse. An old serving-man followed on another with huge saddle-bags. Thus equipped he entered Oxford in 1684.

Edward B—— witnessed stirring scenes in Oxford between 1685 and 1688. The troublous times were revived. Heads of houses trembled, and the city was divided in its allegiance; whilst the reformed faith was in jeopardy. Already a strange ritual had begun to appear in college chapels, for a new king arose, at the best a fool, at the worst a bigot, whose only virtue was obstinacy. He attempted to govern; that was a mistake: afterwards to coerce; that was fatal. He fled to France. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." He fled without hindrance, and was forgotten without effort. Thus England's great danger passed.

In 1688 Edward B——, having graduated, left the University and turned his footsteps eagerly homewards. His father, though scarcely sixty years old, was alike broken in health and fortune from that "hope deferred" which adheres to the promise of princes; a promise which the Merry Monarch gave so gracefully and broke so persistently, to many others besides the gentlemen of Kent. His wife Margaret, then forty-eight years old, bore up bravely, finding abundant occupation and interest in household duties, and in the management (and manage them she *did*) of her three sons, Edward, William, and John.

Dame Margaret welcomed the return of her first-born gladly, for beneath that stately mien there throbbed a loving heart. For five years she had scarcely seen Edward. The stripling had become a man, with the high forehead of his father, and those blue, dreamy eyes which had not looked out of the family face since old John B—— died, two generations before.

He had much to tell them, especially about London. The

city was well-nigh rebuilt. The cathedral was to be the finest in the world. He had been hoisted in a bucket to the timbers of the dome, and saw the King riding below no larger than an emmet; and Millington, the bookseller, had shown him a missal used by King James. Moreover, he had seen the Primate, and had been assured that, upon sending letters of testimony, he might present himself for ordination three months hence.

That was a joyful evening at the lonely manor. One or two neighbours came at four, and the hostess bid them taste the new foreign drink called tea, or tay, a pound of which had been bought at Dover for forty-five shillings. Edward was made much of, and his younger brothers were allowed to sit with their parents. Even their father was cheerful, and remembered an old English song composed by John Baldwinne. And what a supper was laid at seven, served on good honest pewter, with flagons of silver gilt. Surely no viands could be more tempting than the spiced brawn, the streaky sirloin, and the golden ale. And when all was quiet one observance was not forgotten. The thoughtful mother took the heavy Bible, "A gift to our dear Margaret on her marriage day," and read aloud about one who was dead and is alive again, who was lost and is found.

The bells of the vast cathedral at Canterbury should have made glad music in the quaint city; for the morning was fair, and there were bright faces gathered at the southern portal, waiting for the ordination held by my Lord Archbishop. But it was the season of Lent, and from three sonorous voices only in the lofty tower came the solemn refrain, "Rend your hearts." To pass into the building from the fresh, free air outside was to pass into the chill silence of a vaulted sepulchre. There were few traces of recent desecration and disaster; but the Temple of the Lord seemed uncared for and deserted; and the very atmosphere heavy with the weight of woe, which had fallen fifty years before from a murdered Archbishop.

As young Edward B—— passed up the nave to take his place among the candidates, his chief ancestor, the Chancellor, was seen in his heavy robes resting his head on his hand, and gazing wistfully upon so comely a scion of his race. Royalist and Roundhead had passed; the keen eyes of the restless Laud had scanned the recumbent figure; but the tread of their hurrying feet had not broken his long rest. Now was his spirit moved for a moment, as his kinsman approached in the full tide of that life which he had laid down nearly eighty years before, and the old Chancellor gazed wistfully after him. The service was well-nigh as cold as the effigy; the sermon passionless like those stony eyes; and soon the deep undertone of the organ ceased to tremble in the vaulted roof, and the vast cathedral was left to the awful memories of the past.

In the following year the promise of preferment from Uncle John was fulfilled. The Reverend William Sale, who had been placed in

the living of S—— in 1686, found it convenient to resign; and, on the third of July, 1690, Edward B—— was inducted.

The occasion was pleasant and genial, like the season. Looking from the large window of the guest chamber, Edward saw the graceful spire of the little church breaking the outline of the highland to the North. The church was his own; the parishioners were his flock. He was happy at the prospect of much quiet usefulness; happy also in the remembrance that the expectations of the family had not been disappointed. Leaving the invalid father seated near the beehives in the garden, Dame Margaret and her boys walked to S—— Church, some of the grey stones of which had been fashioned by pious hands in the twelfth century. Here, in the half-timbered porch, he was met by the Vicar of Ashford, the Reverend Samuel Warren. After a little formality, Edward took the attenuated key, and unlocking the low massive door entered the belfry. At the instigation of the then Primate, who had issued searching articles of inquiry, the four bells had been recast by Josephus Hatch, in 1636; and the young Rector now sounded such a wild alarum on the great tenor bell that, though the wind was contrary, its vigorous note smote the ear of his fond father one mile away, causing him to murmur with delight, "That is my Edward!"

The income arising from the living was inconsiderable. Unhappily the Act of 1642 directed Church lands to be sold for State purposes, reserving a decent maintenance for the minister; and, as the Commissioners were empowered to begin with the property of those whose adherence to the Stuarts had been most manifest, the B—— family, as patrons of S——, again suffered for their loyalty. Forty-eight acres of excellent glebe, each parcel of land carefully described in the Terrier I have before me, were disposed of; leaving, as if in irony, a few paltry fragments scattered in obscure corners over the parish, scarcely amounting to a dozen acres in all.

Nor did the rectorial tithe, over an area of eight hundred and thirty-two acres, produce much.

Wheat was then at forty-one shillings per quarter (afterwards it leapt to sixty shillings), and the difficulty and vexation of claiming tithe in kind from a disaffected people often caused the young minister to stay his hand.

Apart from the Court Lodge and a dilapidated mansion called Swanton, the families of a few sturdy yeomen and their helpers formed the population. These men well sustained the old reputation of the county—"Invicta." They were a tall, stalworth race, smooth speaking, and of gentle manners, not wakeful to offend, nor willing to forgive. "Ye have angels' faces, but Heaven knows your hearts." There was also an encampment of gipsies; *residents* they might almost be called, occupying a strip of waste land north-east of the church; and these furnish an element of romance in the life of Edward B——.

For it happened, four years after his induction—that is, in 1694—a

shadow fell upon the quiet household at Mersham by the death of the invalid father; and, as the estate was burdened, the widow Margaret rather decidedly set before her eldest son, Edward, the desirability of securing a lady of fortune for a wife. "Thou art twenty-nine," said she, "and Mildred Hall is twenty-seven. I know she will favour thy affection, and I will speak to her mother on thy behalf."

Edward, being somewhat vexed by his mother's importunity, left the house, although it was dusk, and walked towards S——. He was startled by seeing a dim light in the church; and more so when, pausing in the porch, he found that some kind of service was going on within.

An old man who had been ejected from a neighbouring vicarage thirty-two years before was pleading for the faithful in prayer. His feeble voice, tremulous with excitement, was heard bewailing the wickedness of the times. "Thou hast smitten the city with pestilence, and purged it with fire, and yet it is as Sodoma. There be not found ten righteous men within it. Where be our rulers? They have eyes and see not; putting the people into the priests' offices that they may eat a piece of bread. But," added he, "if the minister here be chosen of the Lord, grant that he may have more understanding than all his teachers." Presently the speaker preached from the text, "Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice;" and the discourse, like the ancient roll of the prophet, was full "of lamentation, and mourning, and woe." This ended, Luke Elvey, the aged clerk, who had received no unction, he said, since Master Howe went away, gave out the opening verse of the little known Puritan hymn—

"The mighty Lord is still aboard,
But He is all asleep;
Fair David's son doth sheath his sword,
And none the city keep:
The enemy around hath roared
While Cana's children weep."

With a wild fervour the voices gathered strength, and, like a funereal dirge, the solemn cadence passed over the quiet resting-places of the dead, until the concluding words seemed shouted to the deep sleepers :—

"Awake! awake! put on thy mail,
Smite Ahab hip and thigh,
And let the ministers of Baal
Thy red right hand descry.
Awake! awake! the nations quail;
Thy chosen cease to cry."

One voice there was singularly sweet and clear. More than once had Edward heard that voice during his own ministrations; and afterwards its echo had thrilled his soul, and left a yearning there. Strange that it was to be the solitary music of his after-life.

II.

THE voice belonged to Lena. No other name was known to the handsome girl who came with the gipsy tribe from Canterbury six years before. It was reported that her parents were distressed Huguenots, who died soon after their flight; and a foreign idiom somewhat favoured this idea. At any rate, Lena seemed quite happy, being a favourite with her swarthy companions, and regarded with admiration by the youths in the parish.

And no wonder; for her face was not likely to be forgotten. Who could look into those dark, lustrous eyes, and not look again? Who could hear that silvery laugh loosed from its portal of shining pearls, and not tarry; or see that fair form flitting from tent to tent, without some thought of gentle gladness? Often had Edward B—— noticed her at work, dipping rushes for candles under the awning of Narna, the mother of the tribe, and stayed to talk with her, well pleased with her ready reference to the deep truths of religion, and at her fiery protest at any oppression or wrong.

The girl had passed to womanhood, and he knew it not. To him she was still the winning child, the day's delight, as he visited the rough homes of his flock; but now the tone of her voice in the old church startled him with the consciousness that interest and sympathy had merged into a deeper feeling, and the difference between them was not one of years only.

He took no notice of the secret gathering in the church, for the usual Sunday service was well attended, and he trusted that time would reconcile all his people to "the powers that be;" yet many an evening when the stars came forth, and the last meal was spread, might the solitary figure of the young Rector be seen pacing to and fro beneath the venerable yews in the churchyard, within a few yards of the encampment; and when *her* voice arose like the voice of an angel, at times it bore him aloft to Paradise, and at times it laid him, in desire, low with the white-robed sleepers at his feet.

To Lena he revealed nothing. He seemed so much older now, and she so artless; yet he could not assume the familiarity of yesterday. She wondered at his gravity and sought for the cause, even to the extent of confessing her attendance at the meeting. When he put aside *that*, and sighed, she sought the more to please; and at length he left her with a strange sense of comfort in his heart.

His mother had tact. Seeing that her cherished plans must be put aside for the present, she ceased to plead on behalf of Mildred Hall, who shortly married William Edolph's son, of Ashford.

Meanwhile Edward was perplexed. Should he take his mother into his confidence? She was still his guide, and her affection was strong, but would it bear so severe a strain as an admission of love for one of obscure birth, and dowerless? He dared not put it to the test. What if he explained all to Lena. A generous impulse

might induce her to meet his declaration with a warmth enkindled by a sense of esteem or gratitude, rather than any deeper feeling. And yet, catching at stray words, the straws perhaps of despair, a gleam of hope had passed into a belief that she cared for him more than for any other.

He was soon disappointed; and in this way. For some weeks he had observed amongst his congregation a young man, apparently serious and attentive, seated next to Hannah, the maid at the Court Lodge. At this he was glad, for he knew him as James Coveney, or Coney, a wild youth from an adjoining parish, whose manner of life was questionable, and whose fierce passion had made many to fear him. In strength and stature as of Anak, with handsome features, and eyes quelling and searching, his speech was soft and persuasive, as if at variance with his stern nature. Alas! it was the tongue that drew the unwary into his net. One day he stopped Edward. "Master B——," said he, "we want to be put up in the church."

"Exactly," replied Edward, smiling, "to be married. I expected as much, my friend, by seeing you both together so often. Let me see, I think your sweetheart's name is Hannah ——"

"No! *she* is my half-sister; I don't want her."

"Well, then, who may it be?" exclaimed Edward, amused at the mistake.

"I don't know the name, leastways not all of it."

"Does she live in the parish?"

"Yes; you know *that.*"

"What is she called?"

"Lena."

For a moment Edward B—— felt giddy, and his breath laboured, and then a sudden chill fell on his heart, like the chilliness of the grave. Recovering his self possession, although his face was white and his hand shook, he made a note of the banns, and then hurried home.

Home! the place had changed. The carved oak griffin at the front door, the cognizance of his family, thrust out its forked tongue; and the proud peacock on the garden wall hissed defiance; and the sound of his brothers' innocent mirth in the old rooms seem to mock him. Why was he born? Why had he lived? Surely the life beyond was less bitter; the long sleep in the darkness more sweet. And then a gentler feeling came to the rescue, freed by a torrent of tears. After all, who was to blame? She had never really shown her love! He had not betrayed his own. She was free to choose; but had she chosen well? Ah! could he save her from harm? No! it must not be thought of. One course alone remained for him as his father's son. He must suffer and be silent.

And thus he braced himself for the dull routine of daily duty. The wound was concealed, and none suspected it. It bled inwardly, and therefore was the more dangerous. He assumed his wonted

cheerfulness. At the humble marriage he performed the ceremony. The huge timbers of the roof crossed their brawny arms, beholding in admiration, for comelier twain had never passed beneath since they fell to the woodman's stroke four hundred years before. The minister joined their hands, whilst his own trembled; and then, in a voice deepened by the struggle within, followed the irrevocable words, "Let no man put asunder."

The effort was over. The old church was left to silence. Edward alone remained. A large white owl, startled by the bells, ghost-like, floated up and down the nave. The noon-day sun crimsoned the Norman pier through fragments of ancient glass. What if her white soul should thus be stained? And then came a cloud and a shadow, and the bright promise of the day was overcast.

Three years passed. Old Narna was dead, but, as she lay dying, something she whispered to Edward which wrung his manly heart. Fresh faces appeared in the encampment, whilst James Coney and Lena lived in a solitary cottage, still standing, in the centre of the parish, from which were heard sad sounds at night. Yet no one sought the cause; for the man had grown morose and surly, and his right arm was strong.

To Lena, Edward B—— was almost deferential, and never otherwise than as a faithful pastor. There was always a delay in gaining admittance to the cottage, and notwithstanding her engaging welcome, he felt that the stern husband wished him away—although he soon had occasion to wish otherwise.

For a succession of bad harvests from 1690 to 1699 had more than trebled the price of bread. Wages had fallen to six shillings a week. The yeomen of S—— were in despair. Their dependants were mixing acorns, bark from the trees, and roots to satisfy their hunger. Discontent was fierce: the prisons were full, and a spirit of mischief was abroad. Again the times were out of joint.

Edward B—— had been over to Ashford to take counsel with Mr. Irby and Mr. Randolph about relieving the necessitous, and was returning at night across the Rushy field, when his horse floundered in a dyke. Making for the nearest cottage, which was Coney's, the darkness increasing and a strong wind blowing in his face, a sudden dip in the land caused him to fall headlong. Before he could get up, several sheep rushed past. There was a scuffle, and a smothered oath; and he heard Coney exclaim, "Hold on, Jack, here's the knife."

The position of Edward was perilous. To reveal himself would be fatal; for his pistols were in the saddle-bag, and the risk of discovery would make the men desperate. He remembered Narna's dying words, and for a moment his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. The next he was creeping stealthily back to the dyke, where, luckily, the horse had extricated itself from the mud; and he at once rode home, determined to say nothing about the matter.

That night he dreamed that he saw Lena, fair and free as in the

old happy time, bounding to meet him with childish glee; but, ere he could clasp her hand, she fell forward, something was in the way. He tried to reach her, and the effort awoke him.

Then came the subtle thought, as the serpent hissed of yore, "Why not pluck the fruit? This man's life is in your hand: the law demands it. *You* take it not; *afterwards* ——"

But Edward crossed his brow with alarm. No such thought could rest within. He knew from whence it came, and he crushed it. Yet further was he sorely tried.

For James Coney had made many enemies. In the parish sheep-stealing had become frequent, and men watched. They were not at hand overnight when Edward B—— heard the struggle; but, at early day, certain traces led them to the lonely cottage, where they found a sheep-skin seemingly fresh.

This was enough for their purpose. Mr. Robert Honywood, of Kingsnorth, was induced to order his apprehension; Coney was hurried to Ashford, and he soon lay at Maidstone, waiting his trial.

His wife was in despair. Remembering one who had always shown great kindness and sympathy, she came to her faithful pastor and tearfully entreated him (betraying her nationality by her gestures) to speak on behalf of her husband.

"I know," she pleaded, "that James has shown scant courtesy to his betters, but he is so shy, and likes keeping to himself; and he told me that Master Rogers had given him the sheep for trapping a vixen, and"—with a burst of passionate energy—"Oh! what would my life be without him!"

"Can nothing be done, Edward?" said his mother, who was standing by. She had recently lost her second son, William, the joy of the household, and her heart responded to another's grief. What *could* Edward do? James Coney's virtues had long been of the negative kind; and there was the adverse evidence of that dark night.

"Well," reasoned the compassionate rector, "I might have been mistaken. I did not *see* anybody; and, by St. George, I am not at all sure about the voice; therefore, assuming the man to be innocent, my direct duty is to endeavour to save his life."

Sir Nicholas Toke, of Godinton, held a good position, and had recently been sheriff of the county. Edward B—— rode over and saw him, and several other influential justices; and it was arranged that certain evidence should be submitted to the court which might turn the scales of justice in Coney's favour. But even his well-wishers shook their heads. His antecedents were not favourable. There were six hundred offences punishable with death, and sheep-stealing was one; and, at a time when agricultural interests were depressed beyond measure, the judges were not always careful to consider the evidence in a man's favour. Seventeen years before, three witches had been burned at Bideford; why suffer a sheep-stealer to live when mutton was twopence a pound?

The suspense was trying to a man so sensitive as Edward B——. "If he be hanged I shall think I have not exerted myself half enough," he thought.

The Lent Assizes were over; the postal service could not be relied upon, and the news came that Coney was condemned with a string of others. With a heavy heart Edward walked to the cottage, but found there, to his glad surprise, that the report was false. James was already at the door, a free man, and apparently grateful for his minister's intercession, although he did not say so. After this escape it was supposed that he joined some wreckers on the neighbouring coast, as he appeared seldom at home, until his death, which was brought about by that terrific storm of 1703, so long remembered in England as making many women widows, and children fatherless: and which is so well described by Edward B—— in a letter to Mr. Knatchbull, then abroad:—

"On Friday, being the 26th day of November, at midnight, so great a tempest passed over the face of heaven as no man ever heard the like. The wind, which had raged more or less all the day, strengthened at the dip of the moon, and now swelled into so mighty a fury that our house swayed as it were a loose door; and we fell upon our knees in the oak parlour fearing that the end of all things was at hand. Here our alarum was made worse by a rush of bricks down the chimney, which fell with such sudden force as to smite in twain the thick fire-back of iron, whereon are the royal arms; a mishapen which made my mother betoken some further devision of this kingdom. There was a pause in the hurricane; but, about three of the clock, the blast returned most violent; and when I looked forth, holding by the knotted alder, the darkness was pierced by strange flashes of light; albeit I heard no thunder by reason of the dreadful roaring of the wind; and this, with the shrieks of our poorer neighbours, and the pitiful lowing of the cattle, which crowded at our doors, well-nigh astonied and overthrew me. Thank God! the tempest broke with the day, and none of my parishioners perished, save Samuel Alcock, who was struck with so dire a sweat of fear and trembling, that no man could stay him, but kept calling out, 'Mercy! mercy! day of doom,' until he verily yielded up the ghost for fright."

Edward B—— did not then know that another parishioner was "done to death" by this mighty tempest, and now lay mangled and motionless on the sands at Deal. James Coney and his comrades had noticed with cruel satisfaction the rising of the great storm. As the darkness deepened, lights flickered about the Goodwins, and a large vessel, having on board Admiral Beaumont and a crew of nearly three hundred souls, was seen hugging the shore. There were men more pitiless than the fierce elements; and these watched and waited, as the vultures watch and wait on the sheltered rock until the battle throws down their prey. On that Saturday morning they saw the

tumultuous sea laden with spoil. Some of it was going out with the tide. Who would venture to bring it back? Coney and his mates knew not fear. They were the first to enter a boat: but for once they measured not the force against them. The storm died hard, struggling with a giant's strength; and before they had pulled a dozen strokes they felt its fury. In the attempt to return a huge wave engulfed them. For a few seconds they kept afloat, and might even have survived, had they not been battered and crushed by the whirl of heavy chests and bales of merchandise. One of the bodies came ashore. At first it was thought, being entangled in wreckage, that it belonged to the ill-fated gun ship of Admiral Beaumont; but a Deal boatman recognised his lodger Coney, not so much by the features as by the outline of a rabbit ingrained on the left arm.

These tidings reached the lonely cottage on the Monday night, and Lena, scarcely realizing her bitter bereavement, hastened to the coast and brought back the body of her beloved for burial. It was placed on trestles in the belfry.

That afternoon, when the stir caused by its arrival subsided, and the attendants had left, Edward quietly entered the old church. These events had greatly moved him. He reverently approached the coffin, and, bending over the remains, almost unconsciously thought aloud:

"Is this the end. A few days and full of trouble. Alas! when thou wert leaving this church nine years ago, I deemed thee the happiest of men; *now*, a misshapen mass, wrapt in a woollen shroud. How art thou fallen? And yet without the lamp of knowledge to guide thee, how could it be otherwise? Thou didst but follow the instincts of thy kind—passion leading the way, judgment limping afterwards. Surely," sobbed Edward, now quite overcome, "there is mercy with thee, therefore shalt thou be feared."

"Mercy," whispered a plaintive voice beside him (Lena had entered unperceived). "Oh, yes! I know whom I have believed; and then he was so handsome, so brave, and fond of me," added she, weeping bitterly.

For a space there was deep silence, and their tears gathered fast. The evening shadows began to fall in that ancient belfry over the living and the dead; a mournful emblem of the shadow which has long since passed upon all; but, from the lancet window (spared when other images were defaced), there still beamed resplendent the patroness of the church, the Virgin with the Holy Infant in her arms; and the young widow, looking up through her tears, interpreted once again the letters of gold, "For He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden."

A few mornings afterwards Mrs. B—— remarked, "I have been to visit Lena, and seeing that she hath now no support I have offered her the post of serving-maid here."

"And did she accept it?" enquired Edward.

"Accept it! why truly she did, and declared that no one divined her sorrow like ourselves."

"Mother, it must not be."

"And wherefore, Edward?" adding somewhat coldly, "I thought you wished to serve Lena; and I know she has the highest regard for you."

Edward was a poor hand at excuses, but he at length satisfied his mother (whose only wish was to help the widow) by proposing that Lena should succeed Mercy Usher, recently dead, in taking charge of the church and washing the surplice, at the usual salary; living in the cottage on the glebe rent free. His feelings towards her were little changed. With the deep sense of duty and chivalric fortitude by which he was sustained, he had schooled his heart to regard her after marriage as a being beautiful indeed, and expressive of joy, but with whom he could have no other than spiritual concern. Well had he borne his part, although the struggle had drawn upon his years. But now the barrier was broken by her severe sorrow and solitude, and his strong love, graced by womanly tenderness, turned freely, though silently, towards her.

How deeply, therefore, was he grieved when, upon her removal to the glebe cottage, Lena seemed to grow reserved and timid, and unlike herself. He did not know until long afterwards what idle rumour had whispered in her ear, that the minister held her not worthy to attend upon his mother, and she half believed what she feared. He thought "perhaps it is the hidden grief which alters thus the mind," and he strove the more earnestly to interest her, and to bring back the old cheerful greeting and the look which assured a welcome. In this he succeeded after much weary waiting. Lena was now twenty-eight years old, still possessing "the unhappy gift of beauty." She had never been like her humbler neighbours, and good-nature alone preserved her from their envy.

In her homely dress she always looked a lady of the land, and sometimes when Edward B—— walked to the cottage certain lines of a book which he had lately bought crossed his mind :—

> "When I approach
> Her loveliness, so absolute she seems,
> And in herself complete, so well to know
> Her own, that what she wills to do or say
> Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;
> All higher knowledge in her presence falls
> Degraded."

Years passed. To Lena that sharp separation from him she loved so well had lost its sting. The sorrow had been mellowed by sunlight, the night had slowly given way to dawn. The rector had become middle-aged, but Lena was in the flower of womanhood. And now Edward noticed with a thrill of pleasure, like that of earlier years, that the tender chords of his own heart had met with respon-

sive sympathy. Lena testified her affection in many ways for him. For this he had waited long, *very* long, and almost without hope, so that the sweet knowledge carried him far back, and he felt the buoyancy of youth.

They talked of their marriage. Edward's face was shaded for a moment. "My mother is near fourscore, and drooping fast," he said; "we need not wait long for the old home." He stood yet in awe of the stately Margaret, and knew that the pride of birth would cause her to say "Nay." He himself well understood that feeling, but his hesitation was suddenly removed.

An enquiry appeared in the *Spectator* relating to the disappearance of a girl from Canterbury in, or about, the year 1688. The details were such that Edward immediately communicated with the family of de la Maur, and the discovery was made that the quondam gipsy girl was none other than the destitute orphan of French refugees, bearing a name (D'Arcy) ever distinguished since the wars of King Henry of Navarre.

Edward at once told the good news to his ailing mother, and declared his intentions with respect to Lena. To his surprise she answered, "My son, I have long known your inclination. A mother's eyes reach to the heart, and when you dissembled about Lena being serving-maid I guessed the truth, and was sad; but now I wish for the marriage, for John will take the near-hand house, and wed Margaret, leaving you here all alone when I am gone."

Three months later, when the golden grain was first falling to the sickle, and the lark soared above the earth with a song of freedom as from the spirit land, Margaret B—— came to her grave "in a full age, like a shock of corn cometh in his season," and the deep vault in Mersham Church received another inmate.

Afterwards, when the days of mourning were passed, the happiest of all days seemed at hand for Edward B——. The wedding was fixed, the familiar rooms were adorned for another mistress: all things were ready. Lena had just returned from a visit to her newly discovered relations in Canterbury, and Edward hastened to the cottage to complete the arrangements for the wedding.

I picture them on that last evening almost in awe of their great happiness, so strange and tempest-tossed had been their lonely life.

She, with sprightly eagerness, planning a hundred things to throw the future into sunlight, he, with thoughtful mien, answering wisely, content to hear her voice. He left early, and on the morrow, on the way to ask his friend Mr. Peter Norwood to marry them, called at the cottage. Lena had been awake all night, and was depressed in spirits, and very poorly. Edward attributed this to previous excitement. A little rest and all would be well. Leaving Sarah Horne to minister to her wants, he came home; but the large old rooms increased his loneliness, and he shortly returned to the cottage. Lifting the catch of the road gate, a thoughtless boy, eager with the

news, rushed up to him. "Master Andrews, the 'pothecary, 'a bin, and says as how her's struck with the falling sickness."

It was too true. At that time there was neither preventive nor remedy, and the treatment prescribed fostered the disease. Edward could only see her once, and then she heightened his distress by imploring him to speak on behalf of her husband, James Coney. Only her former life crossed the memory. The poor swollen head was full of fancies. She was a child prattling in front of Narna's tent, and weaving a chain of daisies.

"Ah, those pretty bells," clapping her hands; "we must go to church; we must go"—and then she paused, gazing fixedly upwards, and the hands dropped. She was dead.

Edward B—— was calm, but it was the calm that closes on the passions and hopes of life. For him the sun had set. He bore his great grief manfully, and read, I believe, the service at the grave, for I trace his trembling hand in the burial entry—

"1719, Nov. 4th. Ye Widow Coveney, of this Parish."

But the blow had struck home. Without any apparent disease, save debility, prematurely old and worn with the waves of sorrow ever beating against his heart, he passed out of life. Four years afterwards the stately yews in the old churchyard waved their dark arms with woe; the last leaves fluttered down to the mossy graves at the bidding of an autumnal wind, and the great tenor bell, which Edward had sounded so joyously thirty-three years before, tolled solemnly, for they bore his body from the quiet ancestral home to a quieter home beneath the chancel pavement, "the house appointed for all living."

CYNICS AND HERO WORSHIPPERS.

MACAULAY once said that no reports are so readily believed as those which by detracting from greatness soothe the envy of conscious mediocrity; and there is infinitely more truth and depth in the remark than in Voltaire's "No man is a hero to his valet," which has become a vulgar aphorism. How such an absurdly false saying, refuted by all history, ever came to have so wide a popularity, is a curious and interesting question, the explanation of which may be partly found in Macaulay's above-quoted remark.

Heroes, no doubt, have their faults like other men; the greatest and most gifted beings that earth has been blessed with have had serious blemishes of character; but it is an ungrateful spirit which employs itself in picking holes in great reputations. And if the entire lives of ordinary men were laid bare, with the same unreserve as those of the great, they would perhaps present as many weaknesses without the same excuses. Heroes are not perfect; but what then? We have no right to expect perfection, and if those who are admitted to the familiar intercourse of an illustrious person's private life sometimes happen to be little-minded, carping people, who see only the weak points of his character, the fault is not his, but theirs.

The cynical spirit, the desire to impute interested and corrupt motives to others, is a characteristic of the age. And the worst of it is that this spirit is ever on the increase, particularly among young people, who, if they have it not in reality, affect to be possessed with it, and love to make you believe that they have sounded to its lowest abyss the baseness and worthlessness of man.

This unwholesome affectation—in many cases it is such—is due in a great measure to the influence of a certain kind of literature. The cynical hero of romance has a great fascination for the young mind; it dwells with admiration on a grandly impossible character like the Count of Monte Christo. Monte Christo's hatred of his fellow creatures seemed justified by experience—

> "He scorned them from the centre of his heart,
> For well he knew mankind."

And there is something sublime and blood-curdling in the poetic justice that he wreaks upon the authors of his misery. The genus Dumas has generated one class of young cynic, for the most part an unreal and transitory state of existence. For another class, more numerous and more lasting, Thackeray is responsible. His admirers think they would not be men of the world, knowing human nature, if they did not adopt his tone and cultivate his habits of thought. In

this the great satirist has wrought much evil to the present generation. He not only represented civilised society in its meaner aspect, but he did not try to improve it—nay, he did not pretend to be above it. He said in effect: "The world is selfish, false, bad; never be tricked into believing any good of it. But, my dear fellow, we are part of it; we have no right to be critical; let us enjoy it!" This tone just suited the spirit of the age, and gave free run to sentiments which had better never have been expressed, however much we may be charmed by the genius of the author.

Though we are far from agreeing with Mr. Ruskin in his unjust exaltation of the past over the present, we think some of his criticisms are only too true. And here we may be permitted to quote a passage which the first time we read it struck us forcibly, and reading it now, with many more years' experience, seems to have lost none of its truth. "The chief bar to the action of the imagination, and stop to all greatness in this present age of ours, is its mean and shallow love of jest and jeer; so that if there be in any good and lofty work a flaw or a failing, or undipped vulnerable part where sarcasm may stick and slay, it is caught at and pointed at. . . . Men dare not open their hearts to us if we are to broil them on a thorn fire."

And this jest, and jeer, and sarcasm, jars most disagreeably when heard on young lips, where respect towards others, and trustful confidence, would be more becoming. Youthful cynicism, if assumed, is contemptible; if genuine, it is unnatural and bespeaks a worthless, unlovable nature.

The individual who has experienced no enthusiasms in his youth, who has never felt admiration or reverence for anyone, will earn no respect or reverence for his manhood or old age. And the cynic, before whose glance all virtue fades out of sight, is as often as much mistaken as the hero worshipper who can see no faults in the object of his admiration. The one looks at the sun solely to discover spots on it, while the other falls prostrate and blindly worships. The enthusiast sometimes errs in the extravagance of his admiration, but he is essentially a kinder, braver, and nobler man than the cynic, who in judging others by his own standard acknowledges himself to be selfish and worthless.

Hero worship, which Mr. Carlyle defines as transcendent admiration of a great man, flourished in those ages when great men were regarded as demi-gods—an error which the present generation is not often likely to fall into.

And hero worship, or what is now called such, we maintain to be a good thing—not of the Boswellian sort, be it understood—but such as is consistent with a manly self-respect which has nothing servile in it. It exists in so mild a form in our day that it seems strange it should be attacked and persecuted while more objectionable cults are freely tolerated—as for instance, the worship of Mammon, Fashion, Power, Rank, whose altars are served by votaries as blindly devout,

who repay them with disappointments, bitterness, heart-burnings, envyings; while the hero worshipper, elevated by his faith in what is great and lofty, reaps a rich harvest of noble thoughts and generous emotions, which take him out of himself, purify his soul, and even console and comfort him in adversity.

Let the iconoclasts then look round for some other idols to wreak their wrath upon, whose power is hateful to humanity, and leave unmolested a cult the influence of which is never hurtful, and generally beneficial; and let the members of the condemned sect stand firm and defy the persecution of the cynics, for their faith is worth suffering for. Even though a favourite hero may sometimes trip in the battle-field of life, not for that should they abjure their faith, nor should it ever depend on the truth or steadfastness of one man.

It is, however, a painful thing to see a hero fall, not from the shots of the enemy, but his own weakness. Mr. Browning, in his "Lost Leader," has well described the feelings of the followers on such an occasion:

> "Just for a handful of silver he left us,
> Just for a ribbon to stick on his coat!
> * * * *
> "We who had loved him, followed him, fought for him,
> Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,
> Caught his clear accents, learned his great language,
> Made him our pattern to live or to die!"

But there will always remain enough, even with an occasional disappointment of this kind, to keep up our belief in humanity, if we only take a large view of it, and look beyond the narrow range of our own personal loves and hates.

But when the hero remains firm and true, and is foiled and overborne by the brutal world, then his followers feel bound to stand by him and defend him more warmly than ever. And when the voice, which has never faltered in utterances which once thrilled and inspired him with high aspirations, has passed into the realm of eternal silence, he experiences a deeper sense of his obligations. The feeling of championship becomes stronger, and all his chivalry is enlisted on behalf of the chief who can no longer defend himself by sword, voice, or pen, against calumny. It is a noble fight, and though the man who makes it may possibly be rash and hot-headed, he commands our respect and admiration. He would be a safe friend to trust in time of trouble, while the cynic, who in fair weather, perhaps, entertained us with his satire and humour, would vanish from our sight like a swallow at the first breath of winter.

As long as heroes exist there will be hero worshippers. It would be an impertinence to the intelligent reader—who we are persuaded has his own deities enshrined in some corner of his heart—to go about proving their existence by illustrations. Tastes differ in this as in

everything else, and fancy free, everyone can call up in his mind the particular form of heroism he affects, and the individual men who have personified it. For ourselves, we confess to liking all sorts of heroes, past and present, and of every country. We have fresh in our memory the story of a family who, in our own day, have exhibited a heroism perfect and complete throughout their lives—a story which no one possessed of feeling could read in all its details without emotion. From boyhood five noble brothers dedicated themselves to the service of their country, taught by their heroic mother that such was their duty. In easy circumstances, devotedly attached to each other, they might have lived in peace and comfort at home, each pursuing his own occupations and tastes. But their suffering country called them and they gave themselves to her. It was not as a profession they took up arms—military service did not mean putting on a handsome uniform, receiving good pay, fighting for a legitimate sovereign, and receiving his rewards and honours. It meant rebellion, persecution, calumny, imprisonment, a life of suffering and privation, a daily sacrifice of self, to be ended, perhaps, by an obscure or shameful death. They had no personal ambition, no passion for military renown. Four of those noble brothers, one after another, gave their lives for the cause they loved; and the eldest of all, the one sole survivor, might have died a hundred times over if dauntless exposure to danger could have killed him; but, wounded and suffering as he was, he lived to see peace and freedom established in his loved country, and in the autumn of life to perform still another deed of heroism, which gives the crowning touch of dramatic interest to his glorious career. Unarmed he threw himself upon a desperate assassin, and received in his own body the dagger meant for the heart of his king. He sat upright and smiling as the carriage moved on, while his blood flowed profusely and stained the queen's white dress; and so he would have smiled if those were the last drops distilled from his heart. So had all the brothers, countless times, faced death joyously in the service of their country, as he had done for the king—king and country being now happily united so as to mean one and the same thing. He and his brothers had done as gallant deeds many times, but their life-long self-devotion would probably never have made them known beyond their own country, if it had not happened that he lived to be a prime minister and to save the life of a popular king. Princes and cities have showered honours upon him, but he is no more a hero since November, 1878, than he has always been. It is, no doubt, gratifying to a patriot, however modest and single-minded, to have his services acknowledged. But he does not labour for honours or rewards, for he feels

> "The greatest gift a hero leaves his race
> Is to have lived a hero."

G. S. Godkin.

EDITH FALCONER.

By J. M. Wharton, Author of "Mr. Smith," "Sir Cecil's Rival," &c.

I.

"RUSSELL, I've seen my fate!" exclaimed the junior of two young men, who were sauntering up the broad staircase of the White Lion, the principal hotel in the pretty watering-place of Limpetville. "Russell, I've seen my fate!" he repeated.

"Have you? I thought the days of necromancy and divination and all the rest of it were over; but that only proves my ignorance. Well, is it anything very tragical?"

"Nonsense! I mean a woman."

"Of course! That goes without saying. A woman has been at the bottom of every piece of mischief since Eve plucked the apple in Eden."

"Listen, instead of talking nonsense, and you shall hear all. I've seen *the woman I mean to marry*."

"I congratulate her already."

"She is in this very house," continued Percival Hunt, happily oblivious of the tone of satire in his companion's replies. "I hope she will come to the table d'hôte dinner—as indeed she must if she wishes to get anything decent to eat—and then you will have an opportunity of seeing her."

"But you have not yet told me who she is. What's her name?"

"I don't know. I merely saw her arrive, and straightway laid my heart at her feet."

"I suppose she is not alone, like the famous lady who made the pedestrian tour of Ireland. Who else came?"

"A fussy old gentleman, no doubt her father; a helpless maid, and a little yelping cur of a dog; and she looked after everybody and smiled upon everybody and managed everybody."

At that moment their roads divided, Russell having to ascend to a higher story; so for the present the two young men parted company. But they had spent so long a time in talking over the new beauty that they found themselves a few minutes late at dinner; and then even, instead of taking his soup, Percival Hunt was occupied in casting keen glances up and down the long table in search of his divinity. At last, after craning his neck at excruciating angles to peer round obstructing pyramids of plants or interceptive dishes of grapes, he gave a low cry of exultation.

"There she is! A few places down to the left hand. Wait a moment, and she will lean forward, when you can get a glimpse of her."

His interest, by this time really awakened in a slight degree, George Russell did as he was bidden; and in a moment or two his curiosity was gratified. At last, however, making no comment upon the merits of the lady's appearance, he merely dropped back in his chair after one brief glance without speaking, his expression of countenance inscrutable.

"Well! what do you think of her?"

A somewhat bitter smile thereupon crossed the elder man's face. "I admire your modesty: you have only had the audacity to fix your humble aspirations upon the famous beauty, heiress, and flirt, Miss Edith Falconer."

"What! you know her?"

"Yes," answered Russell, after a pause of thoughtfulness, and in that interval a succession of scenes from his past life passed before his eyes. He saw again a lovely face raised to greet him with a sweet and gracious smile, a yet sweeter welcome in the confiding glance of the beautiful soft eyes; he felt once more a light hand upon his shoulder, and the perfumed breath of a woman fan his cheek, as they floated along in the delicious waltz; and last, he saw himself, a poor betrayed fool, pleading with abject importunity at the feet of a girl while she painfully but decidedly repulsed him. "Yes, I made her acquaintance three years ago," he at length replied to Hunt.

"How charming! you can introduce me. Where did you meet her?"

Russell waited before replying, and again spoke in a meditative fashion. "I met Miss Edith Falconer a few times in town one season."

With that information his questioner had to be content, for Russell either had no more to communicate, or he did not choose to be interrogated further. The Fates, however, were more propitious, and kindlier than his friend; for, upon a large proportion of the company filing out of the room a little later, the two young men found themselves immediately behind Miss Falconer. At the same moment a fan, which would seem to have been attached to her girdle or some portion of her dress, fell to the ground. Aware of the loss, she turned round to recover her property just as Hunt had rushed forward, and raised it from the carpet. With more bashfulness than usually formed a portion of that confident young man's manner, he presented the fan to its owner. The young lady took the fan from his hand, acknowledging the small service with a quiet word of thanks; but her gaze meanwhile, passing over Sir Percival Hunt, was fixed upon the face of his companion.

Russell had never raised his eyes, or made the slightest effort to claim acquaintance with Miss Falconer; for which omission Hunt was vowing vengeance in his heart.

The young lady, however, would not be overlooked. "How do

you do, Mr. Russell?" said she, in her full, sweet tones, while the faintest tinge of colour dawned in the waxen pallor of her cheeks. Edith Falconer had a complexion of a creamy whiteness, the effect of which was heightened by the little rings of dark hair that came straying down caressingly about her ears and forehead.

Mr. Russell merely acknowledged the young lady's gracious recognition by a grave inclination of his head, taking for one moment the slender fingers so cordially extended to him.

"Papa, you remember Mr. Russell," continued Miss Falconer, laying her hand upon her father's sleeve.

Mr. Falconer could not at the moment charge his memory with the fact of Mr. Russell's existence, but in his present post-prandial mood of benevolence that was a very small matter.

"To be sure! to be sure! How do you do?" he cried, with the goodwill born of satisfied nature; and stretching out a huge fist he grasped and shook very heartily the hand of—Sir Percival Hunt!

"Your intentions were excellent, papa," said Edith, smiling; "but you have made a mistake and selected the wrong person."

Mr. Falconer felt over a large expanse of waistcoat, where in time he found his eye-glasses; these he proceeded to fix upon his nose to assist his vision or his memory. Russell had no alternative but to introduce Sir Percival to the Falconers, but he did it as briefly as possible.

Mr. Falconer had all the independent Englishman's fervid regard for everything approaching a title; so it was with a marked increase of urbanity that he now greeted young Hunt afresh. Edith meanwhile walked on and entered their private sitting-room, whither her father proposed that their new acquaintances should adjourn to finish the evening: this hospitable proposal, though, Russell persisted in declining, and in bidding the giver good-night. But the last words the young men heard, as they went on their way, was a confused murmur of "glad to see you any evening—whist—my daughter—tea—music."

Percival Hunt cast a rueful glance backward. "Why would you not go in when we were asked?" demanded he of his companion, savagely.

"I was actuated by a careful regard for your welfare, young man; you are better away from there."

"Look here, Russell; if you think I am going to stand tutoring and being hectored over in this fashion, you are mistaken."

"My dear fellow, I don't want to hector or tutor or anything of the sort; but listen to a few words of wisdom: a man had better put his head into the jaws of a lion than his heart into Miss Falconer's cruel hands."

II.

NOTWITHSTANDING Russell's wise foresight and good resolutions, both young men spent a large portion of the next two days in the company

of the Falconers; upon the third evening they were their guests at dinner. Edith had been in a very charming mood, and Hunt was in the seventh heaven of bliss.

As for her father, if the first endeavour of a host should be to please his guests, then did Mr. Falconer fulfil all the obligations that lay upon him by falling asleep immediately the servants had withdrawn, leaving the three young people at liberty to divert themselves: which they proceeded to do by a prompt adjournment to the balcony, ostensibly to watch the moon rise over the water.

And then occurred the first cross circumstance in the night's entertainment, then fell the one drop of gall into the nectar of Sir Percival's enjoyment. Just as he had wedged himself into a corner close to Miss Falconer, on the excuse of screening her from the wind, and was giving her much information upon the various kinds of craft, with a promise of getting his yacht round from Southampton, and Edith was listening as though she had that moment discovered in nautical life her true vocation in the world—just at that propitious moment a letter was handed to Sir Percival Hunt requiring a reply by that night's post. He had no time to lose; so inwardly swearing at his correspondent, and at the noble institution of the penny post, young Hunt went off to his own rooms to attend to the business in question.

The young lady left thus to his powers of entertainment, George Russell made no attempt to emulate Sir Percival in his amiable endeavours to amuse Miss Falconer; on the contrary, he remained in his place, aloof and self-absorbed. The girl's manner also was altered; her gaiety of speech and demeanour had been instantly exchanged for the most absolute gravity and quiet. And so in silence they watched the stately moon mount into the highest heavens; in silence they watched the shaft of quivering light shoot across the restless waters to the strand beneath; in silence each waited for what might next occur.

The stillness was at length broken by Miss Falconer. "A good many moons," said she, with a faint little sigh, "have risen and set since we watched one together."

Aroused by the sound of her voice, Russell turned his head slowly, as though reluctant to do so, and looked at his companion. The radiance from the lighted windows fell full upon her, and revealed every line and detail of the beautiful figure to the young man's unwilling gaze. He remembered how her beauty had beguiled him before; perhaps felt how it might beguile him again, despite his experience, despite his old hard lesson: so it was with bitterness and anger that he replied:

"A good many; time enough for me to have learned wisdom. As for Miss Falconer, she had no need to acquire it. Her admirable prudence was established then."

"Wisdom! prudence! Of course, a man always puts the hardest

construction upon a woman's conduct. Do you suppose that I was not trying to act for the best?"

"And you succeeded: most certainly you acted for the best in refusing to share a poor man's poverty, in preferring wealth and luxury to possible privation."

"I suffered, George," said the girl, piteously. And her tone of quiet sadness moved the young man more than any warmth of denial or justification would have done.

"You brought desolation and despair over me; you blighted my whole life," said Russell, in a voice of more emotion than he had yet spoken.

"Are you never going to forgive me the wrong?" asked she, stretching out a small, imploring hand.

Russell took the hand, and what folly he might have been guilty of next can never be known; for at that moment both were startled by the sound of the window being thrown wide.

"My father!" cried Edith, nervously. But the intruder proved to be only Sir Percival Hunt.

His return, though, was the signal for retiring again indoors; and half an hour later Sir Percival and Edith were singing a sentimental duet, and Russell was grinding his teeth in wonder over the vanity and greed of conquest inborn in women, and firmly resolving, for his own part, to give Miss Falconer and her witcheries a wide berth.

The conversation between Mr. and Miss Falconer at breakfast next morning was desultory and spasmodic. Miss Falconer appeared to be in a serious mood, deserted alike by her usually good spirits and appetite.

"Have some of this pie, Edith; it is excellent," urged Mr. Falconer, his mouth full, and gobbling away in a manner that left no doubt of the sincerity of his tribute to the pie. "Do you know, I like that young man very much," he added, rather abruptly.

"What young man? Whom do you mean?" asked Edith, a new animation in her face and tones.

"Sir Percival Hunt, of course!"

"Ah, yes! he is so very modest and retiring."

"He is something better—hearty and frank and outspoken."

"And, what is better still, he is a baronet and has a rent roll of some thousands a year, I suppose?" answered Miss Falconer, with a bitter wisdom.

"True, true," answered her father, not perceiving that her remark was made in a cynical spirit. "I have found out all about him. It is clear, Edith, that he admires you."

Miss Falconer neither assented nor dissented, but stirred and sipped her tea as though absorbed therewith.

"I say that I really believe you have made a conquest," said her father; but despite a laboured attempt at playfulness, his look at his daughter was sharp and anxious.

Complete silence still on the part of Miss Falconer: the point did not appear to interest her.

"Eh! Edith?"

"Well, papa, if you are right in your suggestion," spoke she, at length, scornfully, "all I can say is that I hope I shall succeed in retaining some humility of spirit under the immense honour."

"Young lady, I insist upon your treating Sir Percival Hunt with every respect," foamed the father; "and if he should do you the honour—for honour it would be, however you may sneer—of making you a proposal, I insist upon your accepting him."

Miss Falconer raised her head, angry rebellion written upon every feature of her face. "I cannot submit to be dictated to upon ——" she commenced warmly, then suddenly arrested herself, while a look of reflection took the place of indignation that had glowed in her eyes, which in its turn, after a moment or two of silent thought, gave way to a mischievous sparkle.

"Well?" ejaculated her father. "What have you to say?"

"Nothing," answered Edith, resuming her breakfast; but as she did so, it was evident by the smile dimpling about her mouth that some new idea was causing her amusement. "Nothing; perhaps I was beginning to speak rather too warmly. We will let the future alone, papa, to bring what it may."

III.

SEATED upon one of the tables in his friend's room, a very few days later, was Sir Percival Hunt, dangling his long legs and self-complacent and boastful as usual. As a rule these characteristics only amused his companion; but upon this occasion they were particularly obnoxious to Russell, for his theme was Miss Edith Falconer, and the progress he, Hunt, had made in her good graces.

"Will you come to the wedding, Russell?"

"That wedding will never take place, to come to," answered the other, wrathfully.

"Oh, well, you will see!" said Sir Percival, humming a tune with an air of nonchalance, but piqued, nevertheless, by his companion's incredulity. "I will soon give you proof. What will make you believe?"

"Bring me the flowers that she wore to-night," said Russell, quickly.

"Veni, vidi, vici!" cried Sir Percival, bursting into Russell's quiet apartment some half-hour later. Saying which, he took from his coat a small sprig of geranium and flourished it triumphantly in the air.

Russell knew the blossom; it had nestled that evening in the soft tresses of Miss Falconer's dark hair, and now it was in this boy's rough fingers. Heartless flirt! insatiable coquette! and Russell set

his teeth hard in his rage; but he none the less resolved that his rival should not enjoy an unmixed triumph.

"I gave Miss Falconer that flower," said he, composedly.

"What! you gave it to her? Confound you," ejaculated Hunt, flinging the spray angrily upon the ground, and himself out of the room next, leaving Russell a prey to his own sick and jealous heart.

As Miss Falconer was tripping along the esplanade the next morning, on her return from her early plunge in the sea, she was confronted by Russell—Russell wrathful, palpably very much in love and very full of indignation. Miss Falconer looked about her, but refuge there was none; Russell had timed his appearance well.

"So," he began, as he placed himself at her side, and they walked on together, "you gave away my flowers last night."

Miss Falconer had recovered her serenity; and, giving a little malicious smile of triumph, she put her hand up innocently to her moist and flowing locks, as though to aid her memory.

"Ah, yes! the flowers I wore last night; so I did. Sir Percival wished for them."

"If the impudent boy wished for the moon, is that any reason he should have it?"

"I don't know; the moon is not in my keeping."

"Otherwise Sir Percival Hunt should not sigh in vain, even for it; is that the conclusion I must draw?"

"You had better draw none," said she, shaking her head in a meditative fashion. "And there is a difference between a whole useful planet and a few poor little flowers."

"So that is all the value you attach to my gifts," resumed Russell, rendered more angry than ever by her imperturbability.

"But the bunch was quite withered," answered Edith, looking up into the young man's face with an expression of infantine simplicity. "The flowers were quite faded, and their possession made him so very happy—or at least he *said* so."

"Oh, Miss Falconer, having such a regard for Sir Percival, I have nothing more to say."

"Regard! yes, my father likes him very much," turning her head aside with an admirable affectation of coyness. "Indeed, so do I."

"That is enough," said Russell. "How favoured he should feel himself! And I can only ask pardon if I have occasionally seemed intrusive."

"Intrusive! Please do not think it, Mr. Russell. That we—we *like* Sir Percival is no reason that we should desire an absolute dearth of acquaintance, save for himself."

Russell turned and faced her. "Edith, what a fool I have been to come and place myself again in your power!" he exclaimed, passionately. "Hopes, of which I now see the wild delusiveness, have

kept me in your presence only to bring back the old darkness, the old frightful despair."

At last the frivolous heart of the vain and thoughtless coquette seemed to be touched. She turned her head aside, having not a word to answer to the young man's implied reproaches.

"Do you hate me?" he resumed. "Look at me and tell me the truth. Do you *hate* me, that you torment me so?"

"No; it is wrong to hate anyone," answered Miss Falconer, primly. But the next moment the malicious sparkle died out of her eyes, her face was suffused with soft colour, and her mouth trembled with an emotion all too palpable.

Russell was swift to read these signs; and a great light of joy suddenly illumined his countenance. But the next moment his face darkened again, and the hands he was stretching out to meet hers were raised with a gesture, as though to repel.

"I suppose this is some new coquetry being played off upon me, to make me more hopelessly, degradingly, your slave."

"How you mistrust and malign me," sighed Edith.

"I have had a bitter experience to teach me, Miss Falconer."

"Perhaps I too have had a lesson," said Edith, raising her eyes shyly to his for a moment.

Something which he read in that brief glance satisfied Russell.

"My darling! my own darling, at last!" he murmured, in a voice almost choked with the great wave of happiness that was drowning his heart.

"When may I speak to your father, Edith?" asked he, after a pause, in which he had felt strongly tempted to defy all the curious souls on the esplanade, and take her into his arms then and there.

"There is no hurry, is there?" answered Edith, a shade of concern drawing over her face.

"If he should oppose my suit," questioned Russell, meeting her expression jealously, "will you throw me over?"

"No; I will be faithful to you for my whole life: only I cannot hastily do anything in violent opposition to my father."

There was a trembling earnestness in the girl's voice, which might have assured Russell of her truth, but he persisted in his questions.

"Will you never repent this? Do you not remember the determination with which you cast me away before? You said that I must be *mad* to pretend to you."

"I think so still," she answered, with a sweet shamefaced laugh. "The only difference is that I find myself to be a fellow lunatic."

"You told me that my income was not enough to furnish you with gloves."

"Did I? And is it the truth?"

"That was your estimate of my means."

"Very well; I will go without gloves. I have learned that they are not indispensable to life, but—love is," she added, softly. And

the last spark of distrust died out of Russell's heart; he saw how noble and true was the girl's nature, notwithstanding that youthful ambition and vanity might have misled her once.

"I shall speak, then, to your father this morning, Edith; it will put an end to Hunt's pretensions."

"Poor dear Sir Percival! How useful he has been!"

"Poor dear, indeed! Miss Falconer, I beg that you will reserve all such affectionate titles for myself, and not waste them on that young monkey."

"I am sure that we ought to feel grateful to him—we are indebted to him for our happiness."

"But he will hardly appreciate an expression of our gratitude. It is time, however, that he was undeceived. I can't help feeling sorry for him," said Russell, magnanimously, in the security of his own happiness.

"Compassion would be quite wasted," answered Edith, laughing. "Sir Percival is capable of a very ardent attachment to but one person in the world, and that is himself."

IV.

A COUPLE of hours later upon that same morning Sir Percival Hunt sought and obtained an interview with Mr. Falconer. The latter accorded him his usual effusive, not to say noisy, greeting.

"Sit down, Sir Percival; sit down. Glad to see you," said he, with a smile of welcome broad and bland.

Hunt accepted the proffered support; and, with the agreeable absence of mauvaise honte which was the unfailing characteristic of the young man's manner, he straightway entered upon the object of his visit, which was nothing less than to request Miss Falconer's hand in marriage. Thereupon Mr. Falconer's smile became broader and blander than ever, and in a few minutes everything was satisfactorily arranged.

"Is Edith at home this morning?" asked Sir Percival Hunt, at the conclusion of the interview.

"Yes, oh yes; she is always in at this time. I will send for her."

This was done, and Miss Falconer duly appeared. She was looking very lovely; her morning robe of pale blue suited her, falling in long graceful folds about her perfect form. Traces of the morning's happy excitement yet lingered upon and glorified her face, which was suggestive of both smiles and tears; a tender rose-flush burned fitfully on her cheeks; the dewy red lips quivered and dimpled by turns; her eyes when raised had a new brilliance, but these were kept almost constantly curtained by their thickly fringed white lids, as though their owner mistrusted their keeping her joyful secret; her very voice and step were slower and more hesitating than usual. But these subtle signs were lost upon Hunt; if he had noticed aught,

and thought the changes had had any source in emotion, he would have set it down to his own account.

"Edith, I have been talking to your father," began Sir Percival, taking her hand as she approached, and holding it in both his own. "I have been speaking ——"

But then the Baronet was interrupted. "Edith!" exclaimed the young lady, recovering possession of her own hand in a very decided manner; "I think you are making a mistake, Sir Percival; I am not accustomed to be so addressed."

"Nonsense, Edith! don't be so absurd as to make a fuss about a name. Besides, Sir Percival has the best right to address you by any name he chooses," cried Mr. Falconer, and as he spoke his eye had a certain expression of threatening intended to impress his daughter.

"This is nothing new," Hunt struck in. "You must have seen he hopes that I have been entertaining."

Guilt and confusion dyed Miss Falconer's fair cheeks crimson. "I wish you had spoken to me plainly in the first instance, Sir Percival. I—I am promised to ——"

"Mr. Russell!" said a servant, flinging wide the door at this juncture.

Miss Falconer looked relieved at the interruption; Hunt confused and annoyed. Mr. Falconer alone of the trio did anything.

"Say that I am engaged. Beg of Mr. Russell to wait," cried he, rising from his seat and waving the servant impatiently away.

But as he spoke Russell walked into the room.

"I am engaged now, Mr. Russell; if you will call again I shall be happy to see you," repeated Mr. Falconer, in a tone of annoyance.

Russell was about to withdraw; but as he was preparing to do so, his eyes met Edith's, which so plainly said "*stay*" that he hesitated. Moreover, in that brief survey of the occupants of the room, he had pretty well taken in all the bearings of the scene.

"I can despatch my business at once, Mr. Falconer, and save intruding upon your time again," said he. "It was but to gain your sanction to my engagement with your daughter."

Both Mr. Falconer and Sir Percival Hunt looked up utterly amazed.

"What?" shouted Sir Percival.

"And pray, sir, what is the meaning of this ill-timed jesting?" cried the father, in tones of displeasure.

But their incredulity quickly had to give way before the truth; there was something in the aspect of the pair which forced the real state of affairs upon their minds. Russell's air of complete and tranquil possession, as he held Edith by the hand, with the girl's trustful glance at her lover, left their victims in no doubt as to the reality of Russell's pretensions.

"It is no jest; I consider the subject a serious one," said Russell, with provoking coolness. "I am most desirous, Mr. Falconer, of marrying your daughter."

"Marry my daughter!" cried Mr. Falconer, quickly exploding, while Sir Percival continued to stare at the guilty couple in a perplexed helplessness. "I am astonished at your audacity," foamed the angry father. "You have proved yourself a mean, designing scoundrel."

"Perhaps you had better hear us before you proceed," said Russell, his calm voice in singular contrast with the violence of the other's tones.

"Hear you! No, sir! No; the presumption of a person occupying your position ——"

"Position! I should not have thought that you could take any exception to my family," cried Russell, proudly, his tones growing a little warmer; while, as regards Edith, the pallor which had crept over her face at the first exhibition of her father's wrath was giving way to a crimson flame of indignation at the insulting epithets piled upon her lover.

"You had better go, George," said Edith, with proud, quivering lips, holding out her hand and giving Russell a glance at once pitiful and tender.

"And as to you, madam, the sooner you come to your senses the better," cried the irate sire, howling his last words at the closing door.

As soon as the recreant pair had quite disappeared Mr. Falconer tried to cool himself down, but it was a hard task. To be baulked in this way, just as he had been making sure of the grand object of his life, a high and wealthy marriage for Edith, and the consequent aggrandisement of himself, was an over-grievous disappointment.

"I hope," he began, pulling down his waistcoat and endeavouring to look at his ease; "I hope, Sir Percival, that you will not think too much of this little scene. My daughter is a foolish young thing, and this is but some little piece of perverseness that she will quickly get over. I assure you she had the warmest liking for you."

"Not at all. I'll tell you what it is; it's my belief that we've both been *done*," said Sir Percival, with slow and portentous solemnity.

"Nonsense, nonsense; I never saw Edith show so marked a preference for anyone as she did for you, until this mean fellow came like a snake in the grass wriggling himself into her favour."

But Sir Percival Hunt was unappeased. "I've been made a cat's-paw of, if that's what you mean; I see it all now, a regular cat's-paw," said he, still with a weighty solemnity of manner, notwithstanding that his language was undignified.

"My dear Sir Percival, I assure you you are quite mistaken. This is but some little passing whim. Is it likely that my daughter would prefer a man in his position, a beggarly tutor, to yourself?"

The youthful baronet stared aghast. "What do you mean, Mr. Falconer? I wish I were half as well off as Russell! He's as rich as Crœsus, and an earldom in perspective."

It was the elder man's turn to stare now. Wakening up, he leaned

forward eagerly in his chair. "What are you saying, Sir Percival? Pray explain. I thought Mr. Russell"—and already Mr. Falconer's voice took a more respectful tone in enunciating the name—"Mr. Russell had been your tutor."

"So he was once, something of the sort, and we have been travelling together lately; but Russell is a gentleman, although his prospects were black enough until last autumn, when three people who were in the succession to the Heathfield estate were lost on one of the Cumberland lakes; sudden squall, and all that, you know. Some people have such luck," wound up the young man in a meditative fashion, leaving it an open question whether it were the drowned men or his friend whom he was congratulating.

"Dear me! dear me! Wonderful, wonderful! Such changes and chances are there in this world. Well, Sir Percival! I shall be very sorry if it turns out that I am not to have you as a member of my family," said Mr. Falconer, rising from his seat in a great hurry to consult Debrett and other sources of inquiry respecting the Russell family.

The result of these inquiries was so satisfactory that Mr. Falconer hastened to offer an apology to Russell. This would have been to many men a task of difficulty and delicacy, but it was one that by no means appalled Mr. Falconer. He considered with himself first whether it were not possible to explain away his angry outburst, but even he could see no way of doing this; therefore he determined upon this single occasion to use a graceful candour, and to throw himself upon the generosity of the young man.

But Russell proved as indifferent to the apology as he had been to the occasion of it. Convinced of the disinterestedness and truth of Edith's love, he cared for nothing further; therefore he readily returned some careless reply of acquiescence that contented Mr. Falconer, and henceforward his engagement with Edith was an acknowledged fact.

"I'll tell you what it is, Russell," said Sir Percival Hunt, the next morning, as he continued to dash sundry possessions of his into an already over-full portmanteau, "you have served me a shabby trick."

"Not at all; you were always assuring me of your success. Do you remember the day you cried Veni, vidi, vici?

"And now I suppose I may cry Victus sum. Well! I don't feel cast down to the uttermost depths of despair: I am not sure that the fair Edith would altogether have suited me."

"I am of the same opinion. I don't think she would altogether have suited you," said Russell, with an emphasis that gave the words a new meaning.

SCHOOL BOYS.

Five merry boys, right earnest boys, played round the school-yard tree
And each one boasted, in his turn, what a great man he'd be.

A proud dark youth, of stalwart growth, with crisp and raven hair,
Said he would live upon the sea, where all his kinsmen were.

He loved to hear the angry deep lash the sharp rocks and roar,
He loved to see the waters sleep, when the great storm was o'er.

"Ha, ha!" rang out a haughty laugh, "what care I for the sea?
It is a wild and heedless life, a statesman I shall be:

"I mean to make the world wake up, you'll see I'll plot and plan,
I know there's something to be done, worthy a mighty man!"

"Well, give me gold and merchandise," a fair-haired urchin said,
With fingers clenched, and eager eyes strained on the Western red;

"I'll strive and toil while others dream a lazy life away:
You'll see, my boys, what wealth can do, to buy and build some day.'

"I'll be a poet," said a boy, with meek and quiet tone;
"I'll write and sing creation's praise, and always live alone:

'I don't care for the busy world, it has no soul, no heart;
And in its paltry joys or woes you're called to bear a part."

"No heart, no soul!" a lad exclaimed: "well now, to speak my mind,
There's nought but self in any man who cares not for his kind.

"You may go forth upon the sea, and like a wild bird roam:
Before I make for foreign lands, I'll learn to look at home.

"Beware oppression's iron heel, if you're for statesman's fame,
And don't let might usurp o'er right, but keep an honest name.

"You may all plot, and strive, and toil, with many a mighty plan;
But he's the best and noblest here who helps his fellow man.

"In God's right hand there is a cup of rich and ruby wine;
He poureth out, and best can tell if 'twill be yours or mine.

"So never brag—promotion comes nor South, nor East, nor West;
Let's work in wisdom's narrow path, and trust God for the rest."

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER, 1881.

COURT NETHERLEIGH.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXV.

SEPARATION.

PACING his library at Chenevix House, in almost the same perplexity that was tormenting his mind when we first met him in this history, strode the Earl of Acorn. The cause of disquiet was not the same. Then it had arisen from a want of cash; now it was the trouble connected with his daughter Adela.

By the mantel-piece, erect and noble as ever, but with a countenance full of pain, stood Mr. Grubb. He could scarcely speak without betraying his emotion. Lord Acorn was agitated also—and that is a great deal to say of *him.*

Mr. Grubb had come this morning to inform Lord Acorn of the separation he had resolved upon; and to submit its terms for his approval. Never, he said, would he live with his wife again. After what had recently passed, and after the years of penance he had endured, he could only put her away from him.

"And, egad, it is what I should do myself," thought the Earl. But he did not say so. He said just the opposite.

"*Must* this be, Grubb? Cannot she and you make—make it up—or something?"

"Never again," was the decisive answer. "Could you, looking at matters impartially, *wish* me to do it? Though, as her father, perhaps it is too much to expect you to exercise an impartial judgment," considerately added Mr. Grubb.

"I don't excuse her; mind that, Grubb. And I acknowledge—I'll be shot if I can help saying it—that some men would have put her away before this. She has behaved ill to you; no doubt of it; but she is young and light-headed, and will learn sense with time. Can't there be some modification?"

"Not any," spoke Mr. Grubb. "The pain this decision has caused

me no one will ever know, but there has not been one moment's wavering in my mind in regard to its absolute necessity. Lord Acorn, I think you cannot blame me. Imagine yourself in my place, and then see whether you do."

"I don't, I don't, looking at it from your point of view," said the Earl. "I am thinking of Adela, and the blow it will be to her."

"A blow?—to be rid of me? Surely not. It is what she has wished for years."

"In talk. Girls will talk—silly minxes! To be put away by you, Grubb, and from her home, is quite another thing."

"She must care for my home as little as she cares for me. Indeed she has already taken the initiative, and left it."

Lord Acorn wheeled round on his heel, in surprise. "Left your home, Grubb? What do you mean?"

Mr. Grubb looked surprised in his turn. "Did you not know it? Is she not here?"

"She is certainly not here, and I did not know it. Confound these silly women! She has run away, I suppose, to hide herself from—from ——"

"From the law," Lord Acorn would have said; but he did not end the sentence. He asked Mr. Grubb when she went, and how, and if he had any idea where she was. Mr. Grubb had not any idea, and related all he knew: he had supposed her to be at Chenevix House.

Heaven alone knew, or ever would know, the terrible shock the discovery of his wife's treachery brought to Mr. Grubb. That she should have been capable of robbing him, of forging his name and his partner's, of obtaining the money, all in so imprudent, so barefaced a manner, and of using it to pay her gaming debts, would alone have filled him with overwhelming dismay. But that she should have allowed the guilt and the punishment to fall upon another; and that she should have impudently denied her own guilt to himself, and flung back with scorn his entreaties for her confidence and the offer he made to shield her in all tenderness, shook his soul to the centre.

From the hour of his enlightenment he was a changed man. That which the insults, the scorn of years, had failed to effect on his heart, was accomplished now. His consideration for his wife had turned to sternness; his love to righteous anger. Never again would he bear her contumely; no longer should his home be hers. This most fatal action of hers—the crime she had committed, and the innocent tool she had made of Charles Cleveland—afforded Mr. Grubb the justification for extreme measures, which he might otherwise have lacked.

During the hours he spent by his mother's sick bed, he formed and matured his plans. Not with Lady Adela would he enter on the negotiations for their separation, but with her father and mother. She must return to them; must live under their protection and guidance,

as she did before her marriage; she was not yet old enough or wise enough to be trusted alone.

And Mr. Grubb came up from Blackheath to make known his decision to Lord Acorn. It was the morning following the day of Charles's release, and of Sir Turtle Kite's dinner at Chenevix House.

Mrs. Lynn's illness had been a dangerous one. For many hours it had not been known whether she would live or die. On the Tuesday evening Mr. Howard went to Blackheath, carrying with him the tidings of the obduracy of Sir Turtle Kite: and in consequence of this, Mr. Grubb came up on the Wednesday to attend the examination. His mother was then a shade better, but he returned to her the instant the examination was over and Charles released.

On the Thursday morning Mr. Grubb again came up, as just stated, to confer with Lord Acorn. On his way, he called at his own home in Grosvenor Square, intending to acquaint his wife with his decision—that they must separate—but not to enter into details with her. Hilson looked very glad to see his master, and feelingly enquired after Mrs. Lynn. Better, answered Mr. Grubb: she might now recover.

"Ask Lady Adela if she will be good enough to come to me here," he added to the butler, as he turned into his library.

"Her ladyship is not at home, sir," promptly replied Hilson.

"Not at home!"—and Mr. Grubb could not altogether keep surprise out of his tone. "She has gone out early."

"My lady left home yesterday morning, sir. Before breakfast. Davvy, I believe, carried a cup of tea to her room."

"But she came back, I suppose?"

"No, sir, not since."

"Where is her ladyship gone? Do you know?"

"Not at all, sir. Davvy was very mysterious over it. She heard her lady say this was no longer any home for her; she told me that much. John was sent to fetch a cab, and her ladyship and Davvy went away in it with a carpet bag."

"She must be at Lord Acorn's," remarked Mr. Grubb; a conclusion he had rapidly come to. Hilson agreed with it.

"No doubt, sir. My lady must have felt lonely here without you."

Mr. Grubb went straight to Chenevix House. Not to see Adela, but to enter on his business with Lord Acorn. And then, as you find, he learnt that she was not there.

"Stay a moment," said Lord Acorn, a recollection occurring to him. "Adela was at Colonel Hope's yesterday: I remember Frances said so. She must be staying there. That's it."

"Probably so," was Mr. Grubb's cold assent. "She has, I say, taken the initiative in the matter."

He sat down as he spoke, motioning Lord Acorn to the seat on the other side the small table between them, and took a paper from his pocket-book on which he had pencilled a few notes, as to the terms of the separation.

Terms that were wonderfully liberal in their pecuniary aspect. Lord Acorn heard the amount of the sum he proposed to allow his wife annually with a thrill of generous admiration. Oh, what a fool Adela had been! thought he. Why could she not have made herself a loving helpmeet to this noble-minded man, whose every instinct was good and great?

"Are you satisfied with the amount, Lord Acorn?"

"Quite satisfied."

"It will be paid to you; not to herself," continued Mr. Grubb. "As a matter of course her home must be with you and her mother. The allowance that you may deem suitable for herself personally, you will be good enough to pay to her out of it, as you and she may arrange. I do not interfere with details. She had better have her own separate carriage and horses."

Lord Acorn nodded in silence. He knew why he was to be the recipient of the income, instead of Adela—that she might not have the means at her disposal to lose herself in future at Lady Sanely's. *That* had been the leading source of this last dangerous episode.

"I hope you will take care of her," cried Mr. Grubb as he rose, and pressed Lord Acorn's hand in parting.

"To the best of my power. Ah, Grubb! I—I can't grumble, of course; no, neither at the step nor at the proposed arrangements—but, if you *could* but see your way clear to condone the past; to receive her back!"

"Never again," was the quiet answer. "Davvy can attend to the removal of her things from Grosvenor Square."

Mr. Grubb walked back to his own home with slow and thoughtful steps, his heart filled with the bitterness of disappointed hopes. It is no light matter, let me tell you, for a man to part for ever with the wife of his bosom; to say to her, "Your road lies that way from henceforth; mine this." Especially a wife who has been loved as Francis Grubb had loved his.

That Adela had run away from his home, abandoned it and him, he entertained not the slightest doubt. She had been tacitly demonstrating to him for years that she wished to be rid of him—indeed, not always tacitly—and now she had accomplished it. This impression did not lead to Mr. Grubb's decision to put her away; it had, and could have had, nothing to do with that; but it tended to deaden any small regret he may have felt.

It was a wrong impression, however. Lady Adela had not run away from Grosvenor Square to be quit of her husband; she left it under fear.

When Frances Chenevix quitted her the night already told of, Tuesday, leaving her with the dread news that the magistrates would not release Charley, unless they got the true culprit, herself, in his stead, Adela's worst fears were aroused. She passed a wretched night, now pacing her chamber, now tossing on her sleepless bed. She saw

the matter now in its true colours, all its deadly peril, its shameful sin. Throwing herself on her knees, she raised her hands in prayerful agony, beseeching the Most High to spare them both—herself from exposure, the innocent young fellow, who had been made her tool, from punishment, and she took a solemn oath never again to be tempted to play.

Whether the prayer soothed her spirit, or whether the natural reaction that follows upon violent emotion set in, certain it was that a sort of calm stole over Adela. Her head lay on the bed, her arms were outstretched upon it, and by-and-by she slept. If, indeed, it could be called sleep.

For she still seemed to be conscious of the peril that awaited her, and a half dream, half-waking reality, began weaving its threads in her brain.

She thought she was in that, her own chamber, and kneeling down by the bed, as she was, in fact, kneeling. She seemed to be endeavouring to hide her head, and could not. Suddenly, a faint noise arose in the street, and she appeared to rise from her knees and go to the window to peep out. There she saw two fierce-looking men, whom she knew instinctively to be officers of justice come to apprehend her, mounted on horses. Each horse had a red lantern fixed above its head, from which bright red rays radiated on all sides. As she looked, the rays flashed upwards and discovered her. "There she is!" called out a voice that she knew to be Charles Cleveland's, and in the fright and horror she awoke. Her hair and face were damp with fear, her whole frame shook, and several minutes passed before she could understand that it was not reality.

The peril was there, all too surely. What if Charles, to save himself, avowed the truth, that it was she who was guilty, and was already piloting those dread officers of justice to her house? Nay, and if he did not avow it, others must. How could she, she herself, allow him to stand in her place to suffer for her, now that it had come to this?

The dream had struck to her nerves. Ensuing upon the natural fear, it had created a perfect scare of terror. The horrible red lights seemed still to flash upon her face: and a lively dread set in that the officers were there and then on their way westward, to secure her. This fear tormented her throughout all the rest of the live-long night; and by the morning it had grown into a desperate belief, a reality, a living agony. There was but one step that could save her—flight.

With the first sounds of stir in the house, she rang for Davvy. That damsel, fearing illness, flung on a few garments and ran to her lady's room. To her intense astonishment there stood Lady Adela, up and dressed, her eyes wild and her cheeks hectic.

"I want to go away somewhere, Davvy," she said, her lively imagination picturing to herself with increased certainty and increased terror, the capturing officers drawing nearer and nearer. "Will you pack up a few things, and get a cab called?"

"Name o' goodness!" uttered Davvy, who was three-parts Welsh, and was privately wondering whether her lady had gone suddenly demented. "And what's it all for, my lady?—and where is it you want to go?"

"Anywhere; this house is no longer a home for me. At least—there, don't stand staring, but do as I tell you," broke off Lady Adela, saying anything that came uppermost in her perplexity and fear. "Put up a few things for me in haste, and get a cab."

"Am I to attend you, my lady?" asked the bewildered woman.

"No—yes—no. Yes, perhaps you had better," finally decided Lady Adela, in grievous uncertainty. "Don't lose a moment."

Davvy obeyed orders, believing nevertheless that somebody's head was turned. She got herself ready, packed a carpet bag, had the thought to take her lady a cup of tea, exchanging a little private conference with her crony, the butler, while she made it, and ordered the cab. Then she and Lady Adela came down and got into it, neither of them having the slightest notion for what quarter of the wide world she was bound.

"Where to?" asked John of Davvy, as she followed her mistress into the cab. "Where to, my lady?" demanded Davvy, in turn.

"Anywhere. Tell him to drive on," responded Lady Adela.

"Tell him to drive straight on," said Davvy to John.

"Where can I go?—Where shall I be safe?" thought Adela to herself, as they went along. "I wonder—I wonder if Sarah would take me in?" came the next thought. "They"—the "they" applying to the legal thief-catchers—"would never think of looking for me there. Sarah is angry with me, I know, but she won't refuse to hide me.—Davvy, direct the man to Colonel Hope's."

This last sensible injunction was a wonderful relief to Davvy's troubled mind. And to Colonel Hope's they went.

Lady Sarah "took her in," and Adela hid herself away in the bedroom of her sister Frances. Truth to say, they were in much anxiety themselves, the Colonel included, as to what trouble and exposure might not be falling upon Adela. They did not refuse to shelter her, but they let her know tacitly how utterly they condemned. Lady Sarah was coldly distant in manner; the Colonel would not see her at all.

Before the day was over— it was in the afternoon—Grace came to them with the truth—that Charles Cleveland was released and had gone to Netherleigh. Adela, perhaps not altogether entirely reassured about herself, said she would stay at the Colonel's another night, if permitted: and she did so.

That was the explanation of Adela's absence from home. She had left the house in fear; not voluntarily to quit it, or her husband. Her husband, however, not knowing this, took up the other view, and dwelt upon it as he walked away from Lord Acorn's in the summer sun. Not that, one way or the other, it would make any difference to him.

Entering his house, Mr. Grubb went straight up-stairs to his

dressing-room, intending to change the coat he wore for a lighter one. The bed-room door came first. He opened it, intending to pass onwards, when he came face to face with his wife.

Just for a moment he was taken aback, for he had supposed the room to be empty. She had returned from Lady Sarah's, and was standing at the dressing-glass, doing something to her hair, her bonnet evidently just taken off. She wore a quiet dress of black silk—the one she had gone away in.

That frequent saying, "when the devil was sick" was alluded to a few pages back. It might again be quoted. Lady Adela, when she thought the trouble had not passed and her heart was softened, had mentally rehearsed once more a little scene of tenderness, to be enacted when she should next meet her husband. She met him now; and she turned back to the looking-glass without speaking a word.

She now knew that the danger was over; over for good. Charley was discharged scatheless; her own name had been kept silent and sacred—and there was an end of it.

She turned back to the glass, after looking round to see who it was that had come in, saying not a word. Possibly she anticipated a lecture, and deemed it the wiser plan to keep silent—who knew? Not Mr. Grubb. She gave him neither word nor smile, neither tear nor kiss.

He walked across the room and stood at the window nearest the dressing-table, turning to face her. Could she not have said good morning?—could she not have asked him how he had been these three days, and what the news was from Blackheath? She appeared to be too much occupied with her pretty hair.

"I must request you to give me your attention for a few minutes, Lady Adela."

There was something in the proud, distant tone, in the formality of the address, that caused her to glance at him quickly. She did not like his face. It was stern, impassive, as she had never before seen it.

"Yes," she answered, quite timidly.

In the same cold tone, with the same unbending countenance, Mr. Grubb in a few concise words informed her of the resolution he had taken. He could never allow her to inhabit the same house with himself again; her father and mother would receive her back in her maiden home. The arrangements connected with this step had been settled between himself and Lord Acorn: and—and—he should be glad if she made it convenient to leave Grosvenor Square that day.

Intense astonishment, gradually giving place to dismay, kept her silent. The comb dropped from her hand. "Anything but this," beat the refrain in her heart; "anything but this!" For Lady Adela, so alive to the good opinion of the world, would almost have preferred death than that she should be put away publicly by her husband.

"You have no right to do this," she cried, her face ashy pale.

"No right! After what has passed? Ask your father whether I possess the right, or not," he added, his voice stern with indignation. "But for my clemency, you might have taken the place from which Charles Cleveland has been released."

"Is that the reason?" she gasped.

"It has afforded the justification for the step. Following on the course of treatment you have dealt out to me for years ——"

"I have been very wrong," she interrupted. "I meant to have told you so. I have not behaved as—as—I ought to behave for—for a long while; I acknowledge it. Won't you forgive me?"

"No," he answered—and his voice had no relenting in it.

"I will try and do better; I will indeed," she reiterated: but not daring now to offer the caresses her imagination had planned out. "Oh, you must forgive me; you must not put me away!"

"Lady Adela, but a few days ago, it was my turn to make supplication to you; I did so more than once. I told you I would protect, forgive, shield you. I prayed you, almost as solemnly as I pray to Heaven, to trust me; to trust me—your husband—*as you wished it to be well with us in our future life.* Do you remember how you met that prayer?—how you answered me?"

Ay, she did. And the red colour flushed her face at the remembrance.

"As you rejected me, so must I reject you."

"Not to separation!"

"Separation will be only too welcome to you. Have you not been telling me as much for years?"

"But not in earnest; not to mean it really. I will give up play—I *have* given it up—believe that. A man may not reject his wife," she continued, in agitation.

"He may—when he has sufficient reason for it. Look at the wife you have been to me; the shameful treatment you have persistently dealt to me. I speak not now of this recent act of disgrace, by which you hazarded your own good name and mine—I will not trust myself to speak of it—but of the past. Few men would have borne with you as I have borne. I loved you with a true and tender love: how have you repaid me?"

"Let us start afresh," she said, imploringly putting up her hands. Indeed this was a most terrible moment for her.

"It may not be," he coldly rejoined. "My resolution has been deliberately taken, and I cannot change it upon impulse."

"I had meant to pray you to forgive me—for this and for all the past; I had indeed. I had meant to say that I would be different—would try to love you."

"Too late."

"In a little while, then; later," she panted, her face working with emotion and the tears starting to her eyes. "You will take me back later! In a week or two."

"Neither now nor later. My feelings were long, long outraged, and I bore with you, hoping for better things. But in this last fearful act, and more especially in the circumstances attending it, you have broken all allegiance, you have deliberately thrown off my protection. Lady Adela, I shall never live under the same roof with you again."

He crossed the room with the last words, and quietly left it. A faint cry of distress seemed to be sounding in his ear: "Mercy! mercy!" as he closed the door. Descending the stairs with a deliberate step, he caught up his hat in the hall, and went out. And Adela, the usually indifferent, fell to the ground in a storm of tears.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE WAY FROM BLACKHEATH.

STROLLING hither and thither, just as his steps led him, for in truth he had no purpose just then, so intense was his mental distress, Mr. Grubb found himself somehow in Jermyn Street. He was passing the Cavendish Hotel when a hand was laid upon his arm. A little lady in a close bonnet and black veil, standing at the hotel entrance, had arrested him.

"Were you going to cut me, Francis Grubb?"

"Miss Upton!" he exclaimed, coming, with an effort, out of his wilderness and clasping her offered hand. "I did not see you; I was buried in thought."

"In very deep thought, as it seemed to me," rejoined Miss Upton, regarding his face with a meaning look. "Come up-stairs to my sitting-room."

"Are you staying here?" he asked.

"Only until to-morrow afternoon. I came from home this morning. Sit down, and take some lunch with me," she added, putting off her bonnet. "It is here, you perceive. I told them to have it on the table by one o'clock. They are punctual, and so am I."

"You have been out?"

"Only to Chenevix House. I came up on business of my own, but I wanted to see the Acorns, so I drove there at once, after reporting myself here to the hotel people, to whom I wrote yesterday to secure my rooms. No meat! Why, what do you live upon?"

Something like a faint smile parted his lips. "Thank you—no, not to-day. I am not hungry."

"All the more reason that you should eat," peremptorily returned Miss Upton, placing a substantial plate before him. "You cannot let me eat alone whilst you look on!"

He took up his knife and fork; then laid it down again, intending to cut some bread for her and for himself. Miss Upton mistook the action.

"*Try*," she kindly whispered, leaning forward and laying her hand

for a moment upon his. "Other men have had to bear as much before you."

So, then, she knew it! A vivid red dyed his brow. How painful was this allusion, even from her!

"You have heard of it?" he breathed.

"I heard of the trouble about the cheque last week from the Rector, during a flying visit he had to pay Netherleigh. The man was in terrible distress, hardly knowing whether his son was guilty or not guilty. A little further news dropped out later, and yesterday Charles was brought home by his father and stepmother; his name cleared, but somebody else's mentioned."

She paused a moment. Mr. Grubb said nothing.

"When I reached Lady Acorn's this morning, she was alone—and in a tantrum," continued Miss Upton. "Not temper, but real, genuine distress. 'Betsy,' I said, as I sat down by her, 'I have come to hear the whole truth of this miserable business, so begin at the beginning, and tell it me.' And she did tell me. She is full of wrath and bitterness: and who can wonder?"

"Against me?"

"Against you! No. Against Adela. She told me all; all, I am sure, that she knows herself; and she did not spare her daughter in the recital. She said that Mr. Grubb—you—were at that moment with Lord Acorn, negotiating, she believed, the articles of a separation. Was it so?

"Yes. They are arranged."

"Alas! I have long foreseen that it might come to it. Before there was any notion of this last terrible offence of hers, I thought the day of retribution must surely come, unless she mended her ways. But we will say no more now. Adela is my god-daughter, and I will do what I can for her, but I would rather have seen her in her grave."

He lifted his eyes to the earnest face.

"I would indeed. Far rather would I have seen her in her grave than what she is—a heartless woman. You have been to her a husband in a thousand, and this is how she has requited you. Well, we will leave it, I say—and you shall give me half a glass of that sherry wine."

"Only half a glass?"

"Only half one. I never could take much wine, and latterly it has not seemed to do for me at all. And now, tell me—if you don't mind telling tales out of school—how Acorn is going on; for I expect you know. Fighting shy of his debts, as usual?"

In spite of the mental pain that pressed so heavily upon him, Mr. Grubb could not forbear a smile, her tone was so quaint. "Just now his lordship is flourishing," replied he, his voice assuming corresponding lightness. "He had a slice of luck at the Derby: won, it is said, between ten and twelve thousand pounds."

Miss Upton lifted her hands. "What a sum of money to win, or to lose! He might have lost it, I suppose, as easily as gained it; and then where would he have been? How can men do these things lightly? How much does he owe you?"

The question was put abruptly. A faint colour tinged Mr. Grubb's face. He seemed to hesitate.

"You do not care to say," quickly spoke Miss Upton. "Quite right of you, no doubt. I conclude you feel pretty secure, having taken his bonds on Court Netherleigh—whenever that shall fall in."

"I have not taken any bonds on Court Netherleigh. Believe that, Miss Upton."

"Do you mean to say that he has not offered you bonds on it, as security for your loans?"

"He has offered them over and over again. But I have never taken them. In the first place, it would have been no true security—Court Netherleigh is not his, and there exists, of course, just a possibility that it may never be his: for he—he is older than its present possessor," concluded Mr. Grubb, his eyes meeting Miss Upton's. "No; for what I have lent Lord Acorn, I possess no security, beyond his acknowledgment."

"Ah," shortly commented Miss Upton. "I told you once, you know, that you were safe in letting him borrow money on the Netherleigh estate. But I did not mean to imply that I sanctioned your doing so; certainly not to help him to any extent."

"I have not helped him to any great extent. At least, not to more than I can afford to lose with equanimity. I have never advanced to him a sum, large or small, but in the full consciousness that it would probably never be returned."

Miss Upton nodded her approval, and passed to another topic. "Will you tell me how your mother is?" she asked. "I hear she is so ill as to be in danger, and that you have been afraid to leave her."

"She was in danger three or four days ago, and I was sent for in haste. But the danger has passed, and she is tolerably well again—save for weakness. My mother has had several of these attacks now, and it seems to me that each one is more severe than the last. They are connected with the heart."

"Ay, we must all have some affliction or other as we draw near to the close of life; some reminder, more or less ominous in itself, that God will soon be calling us to that better world where there is neither sickness nor death," she remarked dreamily. "She is going—and I am going—and yet——"

"Not you, surely, dear Miss Upton!" he interrupted, struck with the words.

She looked at him for a moment, saw his concern, and smiled.

"Are we not all going?" she asked—"some sooner, some later. And yet, I was about to say, what a short time ago it seems since I

and Catherine Grant were girls together; dear friends and companions! How much I should like to see her!"

"Would you really like to do so? Would you care to go to Blackheath?"

"Ay, I should. But I don't know how to get there. When one comes to be hard upon sixty years of age, and not strong, these short railway journeys try one mightily. I know they try me."

"Dear Miss Upton, you can go to Blackheath without the slightest exertion or trouble. My carriage will take you to my mother's door, and bring you back to this. Shall it do so?"

"Without trouble, you say?"

"Certainly. What trouble can there be?"

"Then I will go this afternoon. No time like the present. I had meant to do two or three errands for myself, and told the fly to be here at three o'clock, but Annis can do them for me."

"The carriage shall be here instead. Will you have it open or shut?"

"Open to go. Closed to return, if it be at all late. Catherine and I will have a great deal to say to each other; once we meet, we shall not be in haste to part. That is, if she does not cherish too much resentment to speak to me at all. Of course you will accompany me?"

"Of course I will," he answered: and hastened away to give the necessary orders. Not to his house; he did not go near that; and did not intend to, until fully assured that Lady Adela had left it; he went direct to the stables.

At three o'clock the carriage stood before the door of the hotel. Its master stood waiting, and Miss Upton came out, followed by her maid Annis, who was departing to do the errands. Mr. Grubb handed in Miss Upton, and they drove to Blackheath.

"Catherine!"

"Margery!"

The names simultaneously broke from their lips when the early friends met; they who had lived estranged for the better part of their lives. Mrs. Lynn was in what she called her invalid's sitting-room, one that opened from her bed-chamber and which she occupied when she was too ill to go downstairs. She was lying on a sofa by the open window—from which window there was to be seen so fair a landscape—but she rose when Miss Upton entered.

They sat down on the sofa side by side, hand clasping hand. Grievances were forgotten, estrangement was at an end. Miss Upton had taken off her bonnet and mantle, and looked as much at home as though she had lived there for years. They fell to talking of the old days. Francis stayed below with his sister.

"I did not think to see you again, Margery, on this side the grave," spoke Mrs. Lynn. "Not so very long ago, I should have declined a visit from you had you proffered it. Only when sickness has tamed the spirit do we put aside animosities."

"And *therefore* towards the end of life sickness comes to us. I said so this afternoon to your son. We quarrel and fight and take vengeance on one another in our hot-headed days; but when the blood chills with years and the world is fading from us, we see what our crooked ways have been worth."

"You were all very bitter with me for marrying Christopher Grubb, Margery; and you took care to let me know it. Uncle Francis—as we used to call Sir Francis Netherleigh, though without the slightest right to do so—was the most bitter of all."

"Just as Elizabeth Acorn's girls call me 'Aunt' in these later years," remarked Miss Upton. "Yes, Uncle Francis was very angry. He thought you had thrown yourself away."

"Elizabeth Acorn has never condescended to take the slightest notice of me. Although my son has married her daughter, she has never, I believe, said to him so much as 'Is your mother well?' she has never given him the smallest intimation that she remembers we were friends and companions in early life."

"Betsy always had her crotchets; and they don't diminish with age," returned Miss Upton. "She may be called a disappointed woman; and disappointment seldom renders anyone more genial."

Mrs. Lynn did not understand. "Disappointed in what way?"

"In her husband. Not in himself, but in his means. When Betsy married him, it was to enter, as she supposed, upon a career of unlimited wealth, ease and splendour. Instead of that, she found him to be the most reckless of men as regards money, spending all before him, and her life has been one of almost perpetual embarrassment. You little think what shifts she has been sometimes put to. It has soured her, Catherine.——What a noble man your son is," added the speaker, after a brief pause. "One in a thousand."

"And what a miserable mistake he made in wedding Adela Chenevix!" returned Mrs. Lynn with emotion. "She makes him the most wretched wife. He does not open his lips to me, he never will do it; but I can see what a blighted life his is—and I hear others speak of it. I cannot help thinking that he is in some especial trouble with her at the present moment, else why does he remain down here, now that I am better?"

"So, they have not thought fit to tell his mother," reflected Margery Upton. Neither would she tell her.

"You are happy in your children, Catherine. Of your son the world may be proud—and is. As to your daughter, she is one of the sweetest girls I know."

"Yes, so far as I go, I am truly happy in my children," assented Mrs. Lynn. "It is a wonderful consolation. But happiness does not attend *them*. Francis we have spoken of. And poor Mary lost her lover, her betrothed husband, Robert Dalrymple, by a dreadful fate, as you know. She will never marry."

"Ah, that was a cruel business. Poor Robert! If he had but brought his troubles to me, I would have saved him."

"The singular thing is, that he did not bring them to Francis," quickly returned Mrs. Lynn. "Francis had the power to aid him, equally with yourself, and he had the will. The very last day of Robert's life; at least, I think it was the last; he was with Francis in Grosvenor Square, and I believe Francis then offered to help him —or as good as offered to do so."

Margery Upton sighed. It was an unprofitable subject; a gloomy reminiscence. "Let us leave it, Catherine," she said. "Did you give your son the name of Francis in remembrance of Francis Netherleigh?"

"Indeed I did not. Sir Francis Netherleigh had hurt me too greatly for me to wish to retain any remembrance of him. Francis was named after his uncle and his father."

"Were you surprised that Netherleigh was left to me?" resumed Miss Upton, after a pause.

"Not at all. I thought it the most natural thing for Sir Francis to do. I had married—and was discarded; Betsy Cleveland had also married; her husband was a nobleman, mine was rich, and we neither of us needed Netherleigh. It was not likely he would leave it to either of us. You, on the contrary, continued to live with him as his niece—his child—and you had no fortune. It was a just bequest, Margery, in my judgment. It never occurred to me to think of it in any other light."

"Betsy Acorn has never forgiven me for having inherited it—or forgiven Uncle Francis for leaving it to me. I have wondered at odd moments whether you felt about it as she did."

"I!" returned Mrs. Lynn in surprise. "Surely not. I say that Sir Francis did right in leaving it to you. And now tell me a little about yourself, Margery. Are you in good health? You do not look strong."

We will leave them to themselves. It was a pleasant, and yet a partly sad meeting; and perhaps each opened her heart to the other in more confidential intercourse than had ever been exchanged between them before.

"*Won't* you come down and stay with me, and see the old place again, Catherine?" spoke entreatingly the mistress of Court Netherleigh, in parting.

"Never again, Margery; never again. I would willingly come to you; I should like to see the dear old spot; but I shall never be able to go another day's journey from this, my home. Not very long now, and I shall be carried from it."

Twilight was advancing when the carriage, closed now, came round to take Miss Upton back to London. Lovely sunset colours lingered in the west—gold, and crimson, and the changing opal that is so beautiful. A few light clouds floated over the sky; and in the west the crescent moon shone with a pale silvery light.

Lost no doubt in thoughts of the recent interview, Margery Upton sat in silence, leaning back in her corner of the carriage. Mr. Grubb did not break it. So far as could be seen, he was wholly occupied with the beauties of the sky. At least a mile was thus passed. Presently she glanced at him, and noted his outward, dreamy gaze. How this trouble of his had troubled her, she did not care to tell. He had her entire, warmest sympathy.

"Do not let this crush you," she suddenly cried, leaning towards him and pressing her hand upon his—a habit of hers when she was very specially earnest. "Do not let the world see that it has subdued you; don't give *her* that triumph. God can never mean that the life of a good and noble Christian man, as you are, should be blighted. Yes, I know," she continued, interrupting some words he spoke, "troubles come to all, and it is on the best of us I believe that they fall most heavily; on God's chosen few."

He laid his other hand upon hers, and kept it there.

"It is, you know, through tribulation that we enter into the Kingdom," she continued in a whisper; "and the tribulation takes various shapes and forms, as may be best suited to our true welfare. The cruellest pain that the world knows may only be guiding to the gate of Eternity: which, otherwise, we might have missed."

He could but give a silent assent.

"*Accept* this trial, Francis. Bear it like a man, and you will rub through it in time and live it down. Make no change in your manner of living; do not give up your home or establishment: no, nor your visitors: continue all that as before. It is my best advice to you."

"It is the best advice you could give," he answered with emotion. "Thank you for it, and for all your sympathy, dear Miss Upton. Thank you ever."

She drew back to her corner, and he looked out at the night again. Thus nearly another mile was passed.

"Did you find my mother much changed?" he said by-and-by. "Should you have known her again?"

"Known her again!—how you young people judge of things!" returned Miss Upton with a brief smile. "I knew who I was going to see, and therefore I could trace the features I was once familiar with. We were girls when we parted, young and blooming; now we are old women verging on the grave. Catherine retains her remarkable eyes, undimmed, unclouded. They are beautiful as ever; beautiful as yours."

Francis Grubb had heard so much of his eyes all his life, remarkable eyes in truth, as Miss Upton called them, and very beautiful, that the allusion fell unheeded, if not unheard, on his ear. Something else in the words laid more hold upon him.

"Not verging on the grave yet, I trust: *you*. My dear mother will not, I fear, be spared long to us; but she has an incurable disease. Such is not your case, dear Miss Upton; and you should

not talk so. You are young yet, as compared with many people. As, in fact, is my mother."

Margery Upton touched his arm that he should look at her. "How do you know I have not an incurable disease? Why should such a thing not fall on me, as well as on your mother?"

Something in the tone, something in the earnest look, struck on him with prophetic fear. "Dear Miss Upton!—it cannot be!" he slowly whispered.

"It *is*. I am dying, Francis. Dying slowly but surely. The probability is that I shall go before your mother goes."

He remembered how worn and weary he had thought her looking for some time past; how especially so on this same morning when she stopped him at the door of the Cavendish. He recollected how little she had taken lately to eat and drink. He recalled a sentence, a word, that had fallen from her now and then, seeming to imply that she saw the close of life drawing near. Yet still, with all this presenting itself palpably to him with a sudden mental effort, he could only reiterate "It cannot be!"

"It is," she repeated. "I have suspected it for some time. I know it now."

A lump seemed to rise in his throat. How truly he esteemed and valued this good lady, he never quite realized until this day. She resumed

"I know that my friends, the few who consider they have a right to concern themselves about me, wonder I should have come up to town so much more frequently during the past few months than I was wont to come. What I do come for is to see my physician, Dr. Stair. I live too far off to expect him to travel down to me; and the journey does me no harm. I have an appointment with him tomorrow at eleven: after that, I return home."

"Is it the heart?" he asked, drawing a deep breath.

"It is not the heart: but it is a disorder none the less fatal than some of those diseases that attack the heart. It is about two years now—perhaps not quite so much," she broke off, "since I began to fear I was not well. I let it go on for a little time; Frost, our local doctor, did not seem to make much out of it; and then I came up to Dr. Stair. He is a candid, straightforward man, and he plainly said he did not like my symptoms, but he thought he could subdue them and set me to rights. I did get better for a time; the malady seemed to have been checked, though it did not entirely leave me. Latterly it has returned with increased force; and I know my fate."

The disclosure shocked him greatly, brought to him the keenest pain. "If I could but avert it!" he cried, in sorrow; "if I could but ward it off you!"

"No one on earth can do that. For myself, I am quite resigned; resting, and content to rest, in God's good hands."

"And, how long——"

"How long will it be before the end comes, you would ask," she said, for he did not conclude the sentence. "That I do not know. I mean to put the question to Dr. Stair to-morrow, and I am sure he will answer it to the best of his belief. It may be pretty near."

"Do you suffer pain?"

"Always; more or less. That will get worse, I suppose, before it is over."

"Alas, alas!" he mentally breathed. "Should not your friends be made acquainted with this, dear Miss Upton?"

"My chief friends are acquainted with it. I have no very close friends. The Rector of Netherleigh is the closest, and he has known it for some time. That is, he knows I am suffering from a disorder that I shall probably never get the better of. Your mother knows it, for I told her this evening; and now you know it. My faithful maid Annis knows a little—Frost and Doctor Stair know most of all. Nobody else knows of it in the wide world: and I do not wish that anyone should know."

"Is it right? Right to them?"

"Why, what other friends have I? Lady Acorn, you may say. She has never been as a *friend* to me. Your mother and I, had opportunity been given, might have been the truest and dearest friends, but I and Betsy Acorn, never. She and I do not assimilate. Time enough to proclaim my condition to the world when I become so ill that it cannot be concealed."

"I wish I could die in your place!" he too thoughtlessly exclaimed. Though, indeed, trouble of all kinds seemed to be pressing so sharply upon him that he almost did wish it.

"Don't talk silly nonsense," reproved Miss Upton. "You have your work to do in the world, your duties to fulfil. Rely upon it, God does not call us away so long as any remain to be done."

"The young die as well as the old. Strong men, men in the prime of life, as I am, are taken away."

"For some wise purpose that we cannot understand here," she rejoined. "Such a man seems to leave a multitude of duties unfulfilled behind him; I grant you that; but in God's sight, when He summons him away, the duties must be over. How short is life at the best!" she added, in a dreamy tone. "What a little while, looking back, I seem to have lived!"

She fell into a reverie, and they scarcely exchanged another word for the rest of the way.

"You will not speak of this to the Acorns," she said to Mr. Grubb, as the carriage stopped at the hotel.

"Certainly not, as you do not wish it. Or to anyone else."

"It would only give a fillip to Lord Acorn's extravagance. With the prospect of coming into Court Netherleigh close at hand, he would increase his debts thick and threefold."

Francis Grubb nodded assent; he knew how true it was: he shook

her hand with a long, lingering pressure, and watched her up the stairs. Then, dismissing his carriage, he walked through the lighted streets to Charing Cross station on his way back to Blackheath.

It may be that he shunned his home lest his wife should still be in it. He need not have feared. Within an hour of his departure at mid-day, while she was still in the depth of the bewilderment the blow had brought her, Lord Acorn arrived. His errand was to take her away with him; and to take her peremptorily. He did not say to her, "Will you put on your bonnet and come with me, Adela;" he said, curtly, "Come."

"I cannot leave my home in this dreadful way, papa," she gasped, voice and hands alike trembling. "I cannot leave it for ever."

"You will," he coldly answered. "You must. You have no alternative. I am come to remove you from it."

"No, no," she pleaded. "Oh papa, have mercy! Papa, papa!"

"You should have made that prayer to your husband, Adela—while time to do it yet remained to you."

She clasped her hands in bitter repentance. "He will forgive me yet; I know he will. He will let me remain ——"

"Never," interrupted Lord Acorn. "You may put that notion out of your mind for good, Adela. Francis Grubb will never forgive you, or receive you back while life shall last."

She moaned faintly.

"And you have only yourself to thank for it. Put your things on, as I bid you," he sternly added. "This is waste of time. And send your maid to me for instructions."

And thus Lady Adela was removed from her husband's house, overwhelmed with shame and remorse.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DREARY LIFE.

Basking in the light of the late but genial autumn sun lay Court Netherleigh. A sunshine which, on the low-lying lands of the hollow, had to struggle through a mist that told of the fading year, for September was quickly passing.

Wintry aspects obtain indoors, at any rate, whatever they may do without. In that favourite room of Miss Upton's where we first saw her—Miss Margery's parlour, as it is called in the household—she sits to-day, shivering near a blazing fire, a bright cashmere shawl worn over her purple silk gown, a simple cap of rich white lace shading her shrunken features. Her malady is making steady progress, and she always feels cold.

The small and pretty room has been renovated, but its old colours are retained; the paper on the walls is still of white and gold, the carpet, hangings, and chairs are green. The glass doors, that used to

stand open whenever the sun shone or the air was balmy, are closed to-day. On the table at her elbow lies a book of devotion half closed, her spectacles resting between the leaves; one of those books that the gay and busy world turn from as being so gloomy, and that bring comfort so great to those who are leaving it. Margery Upton sits back in her chair, looking up at the blue heavens, where she is so soon to be.

"I cannot help wishing sometimes," she began in a low dreamy tone, "that more decided revelation of what Heaven will be had been vouchsafed to us. I mean as to our own state there, our work, our occupations. Though I suppose that all work—work, as we call it here—will be as rest there. We know that we shall be in a state of happiness, of bliss beyond conception; but we know not precisely of what it will consist."

"I suppose we were not meant to know," replied the young lady to whom she spoke, and who sat apart on the green satin sofa, her elbow resting on one arm of it, her delicate hand shading her face. The tone of her voice was weary and depressed, the other hand lay listless on her coloured muslin dress. "Time enough for that, perhaps, when we get there—those who *do*."

"Don't be irreverent," came the quick reproof.

"Irreverent! I did not mean to be so, Aunt Margery."

"You used to be irreverent enough, Lady Adela. As the world knows."

"Ay; used. Times and things have changed for me."

It was indeed the Lady Adela sitting there. But she was altered in looks almost as much as Miss Margery. The once careless, saucy, haughty girl had grown sad, her manner utterly spiritless, the once blooming face was pale and thin. Yesterday only had she come to Court Netherleigh, following on a communication from Lady Acorn.

"I can do nothing with her; she is utterly self-willed and obstinate; I shall send her to you for a little while, Margery," wrote Lady Acorn to Miss Upton: and Margery Upton had written back that she might come.

That a wave of trouble had swept over Lady Adela, leaving desolation and despair behind it, was all too palpable. To be put away by her husband in the face of her own family and of the world, was to her proud spirit the very bitterest blow possible to be inflicted on it; a cruel mortification, that she would never quite lose the sting of so long as life should last.

On the very day the separation was decided upon, not an hour after Mr. Grubb left her in her chamber after apprising her of it, Lord Acorn, as you have read, came to the house, and took her from it with little ceremony. His usual débonnaire indifference had given place to a sternness against which there could be no thought of rebellion.

She took up her abode at Chenevix House that day, and Davvy followed with the possessions that belonged to her. She was not

received kindly, or treated warmly. No, she had given too serious offence for that. Her mother did not spare her in the matter of reproach; her father was calmly bitter; Grace was cold. Lady Sarah Hope ran away to the country to avoid her, taking her sister Frances and Alice Dalrymple; and Lady Sarah did not scruple to let it be known at her father's why she had gone.

Lord and Lady Acorn might have their personal failings, the one be too lavish of money, the other of temper, but they had at least brought up their daughters to be good and honourable women, instilling into them upright principles; and the blow was a sharp one. They deemed it right and just not to spare her who had inflicted it in wanton wilfulness—and they let her pain come home to her. It all told upon Adela.

The world turned upon her a cold shoulder. Rumours of the separation between Mr. and Lady Adela Grubb soon grew into certainty; and the world wanted to know the cause of it. For, after all, the true and immediate cause, that terrible crime she had allowed herself to commit, never transpired. The very few individuals cognisant of it buried the secret within their own bosoms for her good name's sake. No clue transpiring as to this, people fell back upon the other and only cause known, more or less, to them—her long-maintained cavalier treatment of her husband. Mr. Grubb must have come to his senses at last, reasoned society, and sent her home to her mother. And society considered that he had done righteously.

So the world, taking up other people's business according to custom, turned its back upon her. Which was, to say the least of it, inconsistent. For now, had the Lady Adela been suspected of any grave social crime; one, let us say, involving fears of having to appear before the Judge of the Court of Probate, society would have shaken hands with her as usual, so long as public proceedings remained in abeyance: what everybody might privately see or suspect, goes for nothing. This other offence was lighter, it did not involve those fatal extremes; this was more as though she were being punished as a naughty child; consequently the world thought fit to let its opinion be known, and to deal out a meed of censure on its own immaculate score.

But it told, I say, on Lady Adela. Told cruelly. Cast off by her husband for good and aye; tacitly reproached daily and hourly by her parents; rejected by her sisters, as though she might tarnish them if brought into too close contact; and looked askance at by society; Lady Adela drank the cup of repentance to the dregs.

If she could but undo her work!—if that one fatal morning, when she found the cheque-book lying on the floor of her husband's dressing-room, had never been numbered in the calendar of the past! She was for ever wishing this fruitless wish. She was for ever wishing that her treatment of her husband had been different in the time before that one temptation set in.

No more invitations came for her from the gay world. Not that she would have accepted them. For the short time the Chenevix family remained in town after the outbreak, cards would come in, bidding Lord and Lady Acorn and their daughter Grace to this entertainment and to that; but never a one came for Lady Adela Grubb. She might have passed out of existence for all the notice taken of her. Mr. Grubb had suggested to her father that she should have her own carriage. She did not set one up; she would have had no use for it, had it been set up for her.

They went to their seat in Oxfordshire, carrying her with them. Lord Acorn returned to town in a day or two; Grace went on to Colonel Hope's place near Cheltenham, to stay with her sisters, Sarah and Frances. This left Adela and Lady Acorn alone; and her ladyship pretty nearly drove the girl wild with her tartness. She would have driven her quite wild had Adela's spirit been what it used to be; but it was altogether subdued.

"Mamma," said Adela to her one day, after some mutual bickering, "do you want me to die?"

"Don't talk like a simpleton," retorted Lady Acorn.

"I think I *shall* die—if I have to lead this life much longer."

"You are as likely to die as I am. What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. I think I must—must kill myself, or something. Take a dose of opium, perhaps."

"You wicked girl! Running on in that false manner! Whatever your life may be, you have brought it upon yourself."

"Yes," thought Adela, "there lies the sting."

"What's the matter with your life?" tartly resumed her mother.

"It is so weary. And there's no hope left in it."

"It would not be weary if you chose to exert yourself. You might do many things. Get music—books—work. Look at Grace, how busy she is when we are staying here, with her sick-clubs, and her poor cottagers, and her schools."

Lady Adela turned up her pretty nose. "Sick-clubs and schools! Yes, that suits Grace."

"At all events, it keeps her from being dreary. What do you do all day long? Just sit with your head bent on your hand, or mope about the rooms like one demented! It gives me the fidgets to look at you! You should rouse yourself, Adela."

"Rouse myself to what?" she faintly asked. "There's nothing to rouse myself to."

"*Make* something; some interest for yourself. No life is open to you now, save a quiet one. Even were it possible that you could wish for any other, I and your father would take care you did not enter on it. But quiet lives may be made full of interest, if we so will; a great deal more full than noisy ones."

Good advice no doubt: perhaps the only advice open to Lady Adela now. She did not profit by it. The weary time went on and

on, she growing more weary day by day. Lady Acorn called her obstinate; sometimes Adela retaliated. At last, the Countess, losing all patience, wrote to Margery Upton to say she should send her for a little change to Court Netherleigh; she being quite unaware of the critical state of Miss Upton's health.

And this was the first time, this morning when we see Miss Upton and Adela sitting together, that any special conversation had been held between them. The previous day had been one of Miss Margery's "bad days," when she was confined to the sofa in her chamber, and she had only been able to see Adela for a minute or two, to bid her welcome. Miss Upton, criticising Adela's appearance by the morning light, found her looking very poorly, but she quite believed her to be just as graceless as ever.

"Times and things change for all of us, Adela," observed she, continuing the conversation. "They have changed very especially for you."

Lady Adela raised her face, something like defiance in it. Was the miserable past to be recalled to her *here*, as well as at home?—was she going to be perpetually lectured upon its fruits, as her mother lectured her? She was wretched enough herself about it, heaven knew, and would undo it if she could; but that was no reason why all the world should be for ever casting it in her teeth. She answered tartly.

"The past is over, Aunt Margery, and the less said about it the better. To be told of it will do me no good."

Aunt Margery did not like the tone. Could this mistaken girl—she really looked but as a girl—be *extenuating* the past, and her own conduct in it?

"Do you know what I said, child, when the news reached me of all you had done, and I thought of the consequences to you it might involve? I said—and I spoke truly—that I would rather have seen you in your grave."

"Said it to mamma, I suppose?"

"No. I tried to excuse you to *her*. I said it to your husband."

"Oh—to him," said Adela, assuming an indifference she did not feel.

"And I am not sure but death might have been a happier fate for you than this that you have brought upon yourself—disgrace, the neglect of the world, and a dreary, purposeless, aimless life."

It might have been. Adela felt it so to her heart's core. She bit her lips to conceal their trembling.

"All the same, Aunt Margery, he was harsher than he need have been."

"Who was?"

"Mr. Grubb."

"Do you think so, Adela—remembering your scorn and cruelty? My only wonder was, that he had not emancipated himself from it long before."

Adela flushed, and began to tap her foot on the carpet in incipient rebellion. Of all things, she hated to be reminded of that mistake of the long-continued years. Miss Margery noted the signs.

"Child, I do not wish to pain you unnecessarily: but, as the topic has come up, I cannot mince matters, or allow you to mistake my opinion. You had a prince of a husband; a man of rare merit; he has, I truly believe, scarcely his equal in the world ——"

"I know you always thought him perfection," interrupted Adela.

"I *found* him so. As near perfection as mortal man may be here."

"Including his name," she put in, with a touch of her old sauciness.

Miss Upton made no reply in words: she simply looked at her. It was a long, steady, and very peculiar look, one that Adela did not understand, and it passed away with a half smile.

"For true nobility of mind," resumed Miss Margery, "for rectitude of life, for goodness of heart, who is like him? Look at his generosity to all and everyone. Recal one slight recent act of his—what he did for that fantastically foolish lad, Charles Cleveland. Most men, provoked as Mr. Grubb had been by you, and in a degree also by Charles, would have abandoned him to his fate afterwards. Not he. That is not his way. When the poor Rector was fretting himself to discover what was next to be done with Charles, and the young fellow was mooning about Netherleigh, his hands in his pockets, trying to make up his mind to go and enlist, for he saw no other opening, there came a letter to the Rector from Mr. Grubb. He had interested himself with his correspondents in Calcutta—I'm not sure but it is a branch of his own house—and had got Charles a place, out there, at just double the salary he enjoyed here."

"And Charley is half way over the seas on his voyage to it," lightly remarked Adela. "Charley was a goose, Aunt Margery."

"You cannot say that of your husband," sharply returned Miss Margery, not approving of the light tone. "Unless it was in his love for you. Your husband was fond of you to folly; he indulged your every whim; he would have liked to make your life happy as one long dream of Paradise. And how did you requite him?"

No answer. The rebellious tapping of the foot had ceased.

"It has been a sad, cruel business altogether," sighed Miss Upton: "both for him and for you. It has blighted his life; taken all the sunshine out of it. And what has it done for yours?"

What indeed? Adela pushed back her pretty brown hair with both hands from her feverish forehead.

"Any way, the blight does not seem to have sensibly affected him, Aunt Margery. One hears of him here, there, and everywhere. You can't take up a newspaper but you see his name reiterated in it—Grubb, Grubb, Grubb!"

She threw a vast amount of scorn into the name. Margery Upton sighed.

"I am grieved to see you in this frame of mind, Adela."

"Frame of mind! I am only saying what's true, Aunt Margery. I'm sure one would think he had taken the whole business of the world upon his shoulders.—He is being asked to stand for some county or other now."

"Yes, he is playing an active part on the world's stage," assented Miss Margery. "All honour to him that it is so! Do you suppose that one, wise and conscientious as he is, would put aside his duties to God and man because his heart has been well-nigh broken by a heartless wife? Rather would he be the more earnest in fulfilling them. Busy occupation will enable him to forget the past sooner and more effectually than anything else would."

"To forget me, I suppose you mean, Aunt Margery."

"Would you wish him to remember you, Adela—and what you have been to him? I tell you, child, that my whole heart aches for your husband; it ached long before you left him; while—I must say it—it was full of condemnatory resentment against you. I am *very* sorry for you, Adela; you are my god-daughter, and I will try my best, while you stay with me, to soothe your wounds and reconcile you to this inevitable change. It has tried you; I see that in spite of your pretended carelessness; you appear to me to be anything but strong."

"I am not strong, Aunt Margery. And if I dwindle away into the grave, I don't suppose anybody will miss me or regret me."

"The best thing for her, perhaps, poor child—that she should be removed from this hopelessly blighted life by her compassionate Heavenly Father to the bright and beautiful life above! And her husband, released from his trammels, would then probably find that comfort in a second wife which he missed in her. Who knows but this may be God's purpose? He is over all."

Was Margery Upton unaware that these words were spoken in a murmur—not mentally thought? Most probably. They reached Adela; and a keen, curious pang shot through her heart.

But the butler came into the room at the moment to interrupt, bringing a message to his mistress. One of her tenants had called and wished very much to be allowed a short interview with her. And Miss Upton, who was still able to attend at times to worldly matters, quitted the room at once.

A faint cry escaped Lady Adela as the door closed. She turned her face upon the sofa cushion, and burst into a flood of distressing tears.

(To be continued.)

THE WIND ON THE HILL.

O SWEET is the summer air
  Which steals down the Chestnut Walk,
When the children are playing there,
  While lovers wander and talk.
    But the wind on the hill for me,
      And the mist across the down,
    And the bright light over the sea,
      And ships coming home to the town!

O merry the sunny strand,
  Where waves wash in at one's feet,
And the wives and the children stand
  And wait for the fishing fleet.
    But the wind on the hill for me,
      And the mist across the down,
    And the strong light over the sea,
      And ships coming home to the town!

O stately the castle tower,
  'Mid its cedars, dark and still,
Where ghosts come back at midnight hour,
  And the mid-day sun falls chill.
    But the wind on the hill for me,
      And the mist across the down,
    And the wild light over the sea,
      And ships coming home to the town!

And solemn the gray church spire
  (I can see it, looking down!)
With its weather vane tipped with fire,
  As the sun sets over the town.
    But the wind on the hill for me,
      And the mist across the down,
    And the golden light on the sea,
      And ships going out from the town!

There's a grave by the old church door
  (That changed all the world one day).
Can it be the mist from the moor
  Creeps up as I look that way?
    But the wind on the hill for me,
      And the mist across the down,
    Though the light is sad on the sea,
      And the ships go out from the town!

I should like to die on the hill,
  Some day as the sun goes down,
And the wind, blowing strong and chill,
  Drives out the ships from the town!
    Yes! the wind on the hill for me,
      And the mists may lie below:
    There's a glad light over the sea,
      And a secret for me to know!

ISABELLA FYVIE MAYO.

THE SAPPHIRE CROSS.

By Joyce Darrell.

CHAPTER VIII.

SEEKING A SIGN.

AS a preliminary step to his self-imposed task, Signor Renzo went to visit the scene of the murder.

At first sight this might seem unnecessary, for, of course, the room in which the crime was committed, and the house generally, had been carefully examined and described by the police. But the police, according to Signor Renzo, in stating the results of their investigations, had been guided by a foregone conclusion. *He*, also, was possessed by a foregone conclusion, but it was a different one: why should he not arrive at a different result?

His great fear was that some change might have been made in the furniture or arrangement of the apartment. But this, fortunately, was not the case. The rooms, not unnaturally, considering their grisly reputation, had remained unlet, and the porter had found it rather to his advantage not to touch them. For in the first days after the murder there had been a great rush of the curious to see them; and even now visitors were not rare.

Signor Renzo felt an unusual thrill of interest as the porter threw open the shutters, and let a flood of brilliant winter sunshine into the silent rooms.

"See!" said the man, "that is the sofa on which the Countess lay. Here is the toilette-table: the jewels were on this side of the glass. This is the door through which the assassin must have entered and afterwards escaped."

The bedroom had three doors. One led into the antechamber, which in its turn opened on to the common staircase of the house. Another communicated with the second bedroom, where, as the porter related, the Count himself had slept. The third door was not immediately visible. It was one of those little openings, very common in Italy, which are covered with the same paper as the walls, and are flush with these. Shut, it might easily be overlooked, until one noticed the hasp. It was situated behind the sofa.

"Has the place of the sofa not been altered since the murder?" asked Signor Renzo.

"Nothing has been touched," the porter assured him.

The lawyer walked into the antechamber and surveyed it thoughtfully. He opened the door and glanced up and down the stairs; then he returned once again to the bedroom, passed through it into the

adjoining sleeping apartment, and thence into the sitting-rooms. All these different divisions communicated with one another, and with the antechamber, around which they were indeed built, as around two sides of a square.

"The kitchen and servants' rooms—where are they?" asked Signor Renzo.

"Upstairs," said the porter, "in the mezzanino."

"And how are they reached?"

"Either by the common stairway of the palazzo, or by an inner flight leading from the box-room."

"And where is the box-room?"

"Next to the Countess's bedroom. The Signor Avvocato must have observed the little door in the wall ——"

"Let me see the box-room, if you please," said the Signor Avvocato, briskly.

The little door in the wall required some slight exertion of force to open it, and creaked as it turned on its hinges.

"Ah! it opens inwards," remarked Signor Renzo. He cast a scrutinising glance round the box-room, which contained no boxes now, but a good deal of broken furniture, and was about as interesting as lumber deposits generally. Besides the door already mentioned, it had two larger exits. "One opens on the inner flight of stairs, I see," said Signor Renzo. "With what does the other communicate?"

"With a landing on the common staircase," said the porter.

"Rather an unsafe arrangement, but a very usual one in these old houses," reflected the lawyer.

"That door was never used," continued the porter. "As the Signor may observe, the keys hang on a nail on the wall."

Signor Renzo mounted the little stairway, and visited the kitchen and the servants' rooms. They had the usual appearance of such places, and offered nothing worthy of remark.

"The cook was proved to have been in bed, I think, when the shot was fired?" said Signor Renzo, who was quite sure of the circumstance, but wanted to make the porter talk.

"Yes," that functionary replied, with an astute air. "The cook often went to bed early. He was a little too fond of wine. And the man-servant, as the Signor Avvocato would also remember, was out. Not a shadow of suspicion could rest upon the poor domestics."

Not on themselves, perhaps: but could no hanger-on of theirs have been secreted in the house?

That was the problem which Signor Renzo was now revolving. He returned to the box-room, and, pointing to the closed door, said: "Open that, please."

"It will not be easy," said the porter. "We wanted to open it when the Signor Count came to look at the apartment, but the lock was so rusty the key would not turn. The Count himself at last lost

patience, and told us not to try any more. He hung the key on the nail again, and said he would have both it and the lock cleaned, if ever the door were needed."

"There does not seem much amiss with the key, whatever there may be with the lock," said the lawyer. "At any rate, try to open."

The porter, with a resigned shrug of his shoulders, fitted the key in the lock, and turned it without the smallest difficulty. He uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Not much rust there," said Signor Renzo, quietly, and walked out upon the landing.

It was the same landing already alluded to in the trial: that, namely, at which the staircase divided into two branches. Certainly, Signor Renzo could not help thinking the old house was very conveniently adapted for the committal of a crime. But this is an idea which must have struck many who visit the huge, rambling, and sombre Italian palaces, where, in bygone days, three or four generations of one family lived as in a fortress, and under semi-patriarchal rule.

The porter began to think this tiresome young lawyer would keep him on his legs the whole afternoon. For Signor Renzo, more obstinately than ever now possessed with the notion that the murderer was some person who had been concealed in the house, went back to the Countess's bedroom, and there fell into a brown study.

He had a vein of romantic imagination, and his head was full of the lore of trials. Endless stories of detective skill, of "lucky hits," came crowding to his memory. There was one in particular which haunted him. If only in this silent room, among these impassible chairs and tables, on these rigid walls, he could find some unexpected clue! He longed for a sign to present itself to his interpretation, laden with a testimony as solemn and as irrefragable as the handwriting on the wall.

He proceeded to conjure up in his mind the whole scene of the murder. The young Countess lay asleep, her fair head resting on those cushions. The shaded lamp placed on that bracket above threw its light upon her motionless form. The rest of the room must have been almost dark.

The thief crept in from the antechamber, or perhaps from the adjoining bedroom, and drew near the jewels on the table. Just as he took them, perhaps, the Countess stirred, and, alarmed, he seized the loaded revolver. Keeping a watchful glance on her, he turned once again to the door, but, before he could reach it, she had awakened altogether, and, startled, had raised herself to lay her hand upon the bell-rope hanging beside her.

Maddened with the terror of detection, the thief had fired, and, with no uncertain aim, had struck her just behind the little ear, where one huge ruby shone distinctly. The ball had penetrated upwards through the brain, and the Countess had fallen forwards—a corpse.

Or, supposing that the murderer, concealed until then in the lumber-room, had entered through the little door behind the sofa. The hinges creaked—possibly it was this very noise that had first reached the senses of the sleeper. As the thief retreated with his spoils, and passed again through the door, the renewed creaking would rouse the Countess thoroughly. Very probably, as she raised herself she uttered a frightened exclamation; the thief stayed in his flight, turned, and, through the half-closed door, fired.

Signor Renzo rose, and pacing slowly from the sofa to the door, measured the distance between the two. On completing this operation he gave a little satisfied nod. Then, to the surprise of the porter, who began to think himself in the presence of a lunatic, he proceeded to *act* the scene as he conceived it. He passed through the little door, then turned quickly and half raised his hand with the action of a man about to fire. And then? . . . Well, then he stood transfixed, and while the colour rushed to his face, and the light of a dawning idea broke into his eyes, some moments of unbroken silence passed, and the porter stared in dumb amazement.

Signor Renzo had had a sign.

CHAPTER IX.

TITO.

On the following Sunday morning Signor Renzo was decided by the lovely weather to take a little trip to Pistoja.

No day could be imagined more delightful. The train rushed through the green heart of the Apennine valley, where the sunshine flooded the fields with a warmth already generous, although late winter rains had here and there left a babbling witness to their presence in a torrent whose voice never broke the drowsy stillness of the summer-time. The trees were bare of leaves as yet, but the almond boughs had everywhere burst into bloom. The grassy spaces between the furrows were one blaze of purple and scarlet anemones. On the hill-sides the straight, black cypresses severed the brilliant air, and cast broad bands of sombre shadow athwart the tender purple of the slopes.

On a Sunday the tortuous and prison-like streets of Pistoja seem more deserted even than usual. More feebly than ever breaks the tide of human life at the foot of those time-stained walls on whose surface the light and shade of Italy play their eternal symphonies, where the shadow of a pigeon's flight flashes across the meek forms of sculptured saints, and the crumbling beauty of the stonework bears a saddened testimony to the might of a vanished hand.

The sleepy droning of vespers had ceased in the numerous vast and melancholy churches, the giggling choristers and yawning priests had vanished from their oaken stalls behind the altars, and the sacristans

had chased the last worshippers from the adoration of the relics in the side chapels. Little groups of gossips had lingered for a space on the wide piazzas, then had been absorbed into the silence of the winding streets. And as the sun was setting, and the crisp air brought a hint of snow newly fallen on the furthest hills, the cafés began to receive their usual complement of haunters—for the most part men who spent the evening in playing dominoes and sipping vapid punch.

Signor Renzo had spent some hours already in one of these cafés. Through an acquaintance of his in the town he had not found much difficulty in discovering the abode of Tito. His next task was to make the acquaintance of the carpenter himself. About this he considered it advisable to act with some degree of caution. Tito lived at the top of a narrow way that crept painfully past a side of San Giovanni Evangelista. Near that beautiful old church was a shabby second-rate little café, and Signor Renzo divined that this was the most likely place for Tito to spend his afternoons and evenings. Thither, therefore, the lawyer repaired and patiently waited, even going the length of dining off some indescribable food that would have ruined the temper of an Englishman for a month.

At last, the café being small and the young man's ears remarkably sharp, he caught a phrase of the conversation at a table near his own, and turned his head to listen. Yes! certainly they were talking of some Tito.

Signor Renzo rose, and approaching the speakers, asked politely for a newspaper, which he knew was not there. The whole party jumped up and hunted about; they called the waiter and questioned him; they addressed sympathizing observations to Signor Renzo on the bad arrangements which deprived him of his desire: in short, they were as officious and as amiable as Italians are generally. By the time they subsided into their seats once more they may be said to have become quite intimate with the lawyer, and on his remarking that he had felt a great draught where he was sitting, it seemed the most natural thing in the world for him to drop into a vacant chair at their table.

They were not people in his own station in life, and an English gentleman would hardly have cared to be seen sitting with them. But social spirit in Italy is very democratic, and Signor Renzo did not feel himself to be degraded by the fact of conversing pleasantly with the snuffy and shabby old priest who was cousin to the barber beside him.

"So, as I was saying," resumed the barber's wife to the stout fattore, "the poor angel is positively at the last gasp. 'Babbo,' she says, in a thread of a voice, 'Babbo, come, sit close to me. I heard them say just now that I should soon be taken away. What did they mean?'"

"Poverina!" cried everybody, in sympathetic chorus. The priest

broke off in his complaints about the taxes to listen, and down the fattore's fat cheeks a tear as facile as naïf slowly trickled.

"And Tito himself, believe me, he looks like a ghost," continued the narratress, encouraged by the success of her tale. "I said to him, 'Tito, poveretto, at this rate you will go to the grave before your Isolina, you will indeed;' and he answered, 'Sora Nunziata, I do not care how soon I die. I have only lived for her; for her I have toiled and, Nunziata,' he said, 'for her I have *sinned*.'"

A thrill of excitement ran through the listeners.

"What can he have meant?" exclaimed the fattore, his slow imagination stimulated by the scent of a mystery.

"Who knows?" said Sora Nunziata, shrugging her shoulders and turning down the corners of her mouth.

"Who is this Tito?" inquired Signor Renzo, carelessly.

"A stranger, who has come lately to the town and set up a carpenter's shop," the priest explained to him. "He had one little daughter who was dying of consumption, and ——"

"Zitto!" interrupted Nunziata. Then hailing a man who had just pushed open the café door, "Oh, Tito!" she called out cheerfully, "that's right. Come over here, and sit with us."

Tito, looking very pale and sorrowful, approached, examined the while, it may be imagined with what interest, by Signor Renzo.

"How is she?" inquired Nunziata.

"Just the same. She is quiet. There is a woman with her. I came out, for I could sit there no longer."

Tito spoke listlessly and simply, with no air of seeking for pity. He did not even seem to notice the compassionate looks directed at him, but let his eyes wander vaguely from one object to another. The lines round his mouth, the painful pucker of his brow, spoke more eloquently than words of the carking care that consumed him.

"Courage! cheer up," said the fattore, kindly. "You will have a rhum poncino? That's right. See, here is a gentleman who comes from your town."

A slight flicker of interest leapt into the carpenter's dull glance. Signor Renzo, watching him narrowly, thought the interest was not unmixed with uneasiness.

"Been long away?" he inquired, carelessly.

"No," Tito said, "not long."

"Six months exactly," Nunziata interposed officiously. Wasn't it the very day after the feast of the Madonna, in September, that Tito had moved into his shop, which was next door to her own?

Tito played rather nervously with his spoon, but said he supposed it might be six months.

A little conversation then ensued on the respective merits of the town Tito had left and the town he had come to. Of course, the palm was given to Pistoja, and Signor Renzo was careful not to display any untimely patriotism.

It was universally agreed, however, that times were equally bad, and the taxes equally hard to bear everywhere.

"What can you expect with a government of swindlers and thieves?" asked the fattore, who belonged to the old school.

"And with such an increasing contempt for religion," added Don Checco, the old priest. At this there was a general subdued titter. Nunziata nudged her husband, who said "Sicuro!" in a loud tone of agreement, and winked the while at his opposite neighbour.

"Nobody can deny that crimes are on the increase," continued Don Checco.

"Murders especially," observed Signor Renzo.

Half a dozen crimes of peculiar atrocity were instantly recalled: a parricide here, a child starved to death by its father there, and so on.

"We have all been greatly excited lately by the trial of that Calabrian painter for the murder of the Polish Countess," remarked Signor Renzo.

"To be sure." Nunziata remembered all about that. She also had been greatly interested. The poor Countess—so young and so beautiful, and that birbante of a painter, and the embroideress—no better than she should be. Nunziata used to make Luigino, the son of Sor Nanni, the pork butcher, read the account to her and a number of others every evening. And once did not Tito recollect how the Isoletta—poor angel!—in her pretty prattle had said how she knew some of the people—either the painter or the embroideress, which was it?

"Che! che!" Tito answered. "Isoletta did not know what she was talking about," and then his spoon fell with a clatter to the ground, and he stooped hastily to pick it up. But not even that exertion brought the colour back into his livid cheeks, and Signor Renzo, more observant of him than ever now, saw that his hands shook. Nunziata chattered on, but Tito sat staring gloomily in front of him, and took no share in the conversation. He did not even finish his little glass of weak punch, but pushed it impatiently from him when invited to take more. And at last, catching the lawyer's eyes fixed on him, he rose abruptly, wished them all a somewhat sullen "good night," and went.

The next day, early in the afternoon, Signor Renzo might have been seen standing with an air of amused and interested contemplation in the Piazza Grande.

Around him rose the cathedral with its pillared façade, and the Della Robbia above its portal; the bell-tower, slender, lovely, lofty, springing upwards to meet the generous benediction of the sun; the white marble baptistry with its quaint and beautiful little pulpit beside the door; the frowning palace of the praetor; the massive façade, Gothic windows, and exquisite wrought-iron balconies of the Palace of the Commune.

In that noble square—once seen, never to be forgotten—on week days is concentrated nearly all of animation that Pistoja can show. What remains of bustle must be sought for in the inexpressibly dirty little market-place hard by, where the sculptured lion of the city stands rampant above the slanting canvas roofs of the booths, and watches, with a kind of grim, paternal humour, a scene which, except in the matter of costume, has been renewed unaltered very likely as long as his watch has endured.

In the Piazza Grande there are more booths, but instead of lemons and oranges, and poor live-plucked fowls, they exhibit parti-coloured handkerchiefs of excruciating designs, rolls of home-spun linen and yards of blue and crimson or scarlet cloth. Between the booths stand bursting sacks of grain in the autumn time, but probably on the day of Signor Renzo's visit there were only sacks or baskets of early peas and beans from Naples. There was no crowd, for it would take a popular revolt to fill that piazza, but there were lively groups of gossiping and chaffering men and women, among whom the pigeons strutted unconcernedly in the intervals of their visits to shady roosts beneath the arches of the tower, or sunny ones on the roofs of the dilapidated-looking houses.

Suddenly Signor Renzo perceived Nunziata, who had appeared and was distributing nods and smiles to her numerous acquaintances. She wants to buy a handkerchief, but the bargaining does not proceed very briskly, and the attention of the fat old woman who sells the articles in question being presently claimed by a more promising customer, Nunziata trotted off to have a little gossip with the cripple and the two black-browed girls sitting at their straw plaiting on the steps of the baptistry.

When Signor Renzo drew near she recognised him instantly, and greeted him with the cordiality and sans façon of an old friend. She was not at all superior, either, to the distinction conferred upon her by the mere fact of being seen conversing on familiar terms with a stranger. She grew more vivacious than ever as the girls rose from the steps, and half a dozen adult and infant beggars gathered round, to listen to what she was telling.

Isoletta? she said, in answer to the young man's apparently sympathetic inquiry for the carpenter's dying child: Isoletta? poor angel, the saints had fetched her. Yes, indeed, she had died in the night. Just woke up and coughed a little, and then came a rush of blood, and before you could say an Ave Maria, she was gone. Poor Tito? Ay, poor Tito, truly; he was like a man out of his mind. Violent? Oh, no! not violent, but stupid-like and silent. Would not eat or speak, and did not seem to understand what was said to him. She (Nunziata) might say she had done everything: washed and dressed the poor angel, and laid her out. She looked lovely. Would the Signore like to see her? The funeral would not be for an hour or two yet. Tito had said there were to be torches, and a

procession of young girls, and he had ordered a separate grave, for he would not have her thrown in with the rest of the poor wretches who had died in the week. Ah! it was a great consolation in sorrow to have enough of money, there was no doubt of that. Was the Signore coming? That was right. Plenty of people had been in to see the poor angel already.

So Nunziata chattered. And when she started off finally, to show Signor Renzo the way, a highly curious, compassionate, and mendicant little crowd followed. They were all personally interested in the bereaved father by this time, and, moreover, they thought that this stranger, who seemed to have such a kind heart, might distribute halfpence eventually, if not lost sight of.

Nunziata paused shortly before a tall, gloomy house, on the ground-floor of which was a carpenter's shop—Tito's shop—with unclosed shutters. She entered a narrow stone passage, and, still followed by a detachment of the beggars, as well as by the lawyer, pushed open a door and signed to the latter to follow.

In the room were several people—girls mostly. They were talking, giggling, straw-plaiting—breaking off in their conversation every now and again to cast a glance and a pitying murmur at Isoletta. She lay on her open bier, with the vain pomp of lighted candles round her. Eight candles, for, as Nunziata had said, Tito had "money enough." She was dressed in the neat and homely ugly clothes which had constituted her proud little "best:" a green dress, clumsily made, and a black apron. On her tiny feet were heavy shoes: her pretty brown head was straightly set, her hands crossed stiffly, and she was covered entirely with a black net veil. A simple, pathetic small corpse—and so solemn!

Signor Renzo looked round for Tito. Where was he? he asked of a gaping maiden, gaping amazed at him. Too astonished to speak, she nodded in the direction of a door ajar. He drew near to it and glanced in. Tito was sitting in his darkened shop, among the utensils of his neglected trade, in the utterly dejected attitude of a man oppressed by grief, who has wandered in restlessly and sat down anywhere.

Signor Renzo entered, shut the door resolutely in the faces of the puzzled gazers, and approached the mourner.

Tito had raised his head, and sat looking at him with a curious expression of sullen expectation. The lawyer laid a hand lightly and not unkindly on his shoulder. In clear, steady tones he said: "Isoletta is dead. You have loved her, toiled for her, *sinned* for her. It has all availed you nothing. Why will you not tell what you know of Countess Wanda's death?"

A gleam of sombre fury chased the dull sorrow from Tito's face.

"I will tell nothing," he answered hoarsely. "The law which sent you here for me, the law of infamous men, can arrest me if it pleases, but it shall not make me speak. I care for nothing now. I may as well rot in a prison as die in a ditch."

The pressure of Signor Renzo's hand grew heavier.

"Lucia loved your child," he said. "And Lucia's heart is breaking for Guido, who is in prison for your sin."

Then Tito bowed his head.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE BALL.

LENT, that year, began at the latest possible date in the calendar, and Shrove Tuesday only fell a week and a day after Isoletta was buried. Signor Renzo, back in his native town, had forgotten the law momentarily in the pursuit of pleasure.

On the last Monday of the Carnival a ball was given, in an old historic palace, in honour of the Russian Grand Dukes. The fête was one of unusual splendour, and semi-official in character. All the noblesse d'épée were invited and all the noblesse de robe.

Among the latter came Signor Renzo. About midnight, when the dancing only waited for the royal guests to begin, he might have been seen ascending the broad, softly-carpeted, brilliantly-lighted staircase, which had been transformed into a hanging garden of exotic plants. Just in front of him trailed the satin train of a jewelled dowager, so thoroughly grande dame that her very ugliness (which was phenomenal) appeared a patent of nobility. Behind him puffed a stout general in full uniform, whose breast was covered with orders.

Upstairs all details were lost in a general impression of dazzling light, intoxicating perfumes, bewildering smiles, and scintillating jewels; of old lace, gorgeous velvet, golden epaulets, French phrases, flirtations, bows, and music. Grand old portraits looked down on the scene, and the lustres illuminated the carved and gilded beams of oaken ceilings which some contemporary of Alberti had designed.

When the quadrille d'honneur had taken place, Signor Renzo looked about him for a partner, and was presently enchanted to meet the friendly smile of a little Gräfin, with whom he had waltzed already several times that season. She was very lively, wilful, and impertinent, and had shown the young lawyer a degree of favour which had caused her mother's eighteen quarterings to descend upon her several times with a totally disregarded crash. This time again she departed smiling and defiant on his arm.

Just as they concluded their first turn, and stopped breathless, Countess Hildegarde was confronted by a tall and pallid figure, which greeted her with a profound bow, then passed on, silent, abstracted, gloomy as before.

"Merciful heavens! he might have stepped out of one of those frames!" exclaimed the young girl with a gasp, and then a laugh at the gasp.

"Truly, the ghost of Banquo must have been about as enlivening

an apparition," replied Signor Renzo. "But what can have induced Count Cioronski so utterly to defy les convenances as to appear at a ball not a year after his wife's tragical end?"

"This is a kind of official occasion," explained Hildegarde. "And Count Cioronski is one of the Polish nobles whom the Czar has most delighted to honour."

"You know him?"

"Dear me, yes! My father was ambassador at St. Petersburg until last year. We knew Count Cioronski and poor Wanda, and that horrible sister-in-law of hers, Madame Raschkine, who made Wanda always so unhappy."

"It is really too crowded to dance," said Signor Renzo. "Will you sit in this cool corner and eat an ice? That's right. Cream or water? So. Now tell me, how did Madame Raschkine make Countess Wanda unhappy?"

"Wanda was rather a flirt," said Hildegarde; "there is no denying that. And the Count had furious fits of jealousy. But they were intermittent, for he was always odd; suspected, indeed, of not being quite right in his head. But even when his suspicions were lulled for a time, la Raschkine always revived them by her hints."

"Ah!" Signor Renzo was greatly interested. The waltz was over, and he ought, properly speaking, to have taken his partner back to her stately mother. But he did not offer to do so, and she, hopeful, perhaps, of a little eventual flirtation, chattered on.

"Poor Wanda was even taken away from St. Petersburg at a moment's notice, on account of some story of that odious woman. And I have heard mamma say that she used to write to her brother constantly all kinds of ill-natured gossip which she had collected against her sister-in-law. In fact ——" Hildegarde had a sudden return of prudence, and stopped short. However, it was a very yielding kind of prudence, that only required a little pressure to dissolve.

"Pray go on," Signor Renzo entreated.

"You are quite excited, I declare," laughed his companion. "I ought not to tell you such things, but ——" She shrugged her pretty shoulders, and continued. "Mamma has often told me that when the news of Wanda's murder first reached St. Petersburg, before the particulars were known, people thought it might really have been the Count who murdered his wife. Such an absurd idea, you know, as it turned out."

"Very absurd. How came people by it?"

"Madame Raschkine had at last discovered, or fancied she had discovered, something dreadful. Of course, I don't know exactly what it was," said Countess Hildegarde, all at once mindful of her part of an innocent jeune fille, "but she was so exultant that she could not be silent. She told all her intimate friends, who told all

theirs, that at last her poor brother would be convinced of the true character of his wife."

"Well?" said Signor Renzo.

"That is all," replied the Gräfin. She began to be a shade provoked with him for his extreme attention to her story. It was an act of lèse majesté to her beauty. But perhaps now he would reward her by talking a little of that extremely bewitching and important person, the Countess Hildegarde von Altenwappen. But he did not. On the contrary, he rose with an absent air, and offered his arm to reconduct her beneath the maternal wing. Almost angry, she took it. On their way Signor Renzo asked, "Who is that?"

"That," she replied, "is the Princess M——. Look at the little court of men she has gathered round her. Everyone pays her homage. She is a cousin of the Dolgoroukis."

"Let us go nearer and look at her," said the lawyer, whose eyes, however, were fixed, not on the Princess, but on one of the gentlemen standing near her—on Count Cioronski.

The cousin of the Dolgoroukis, in her ugliness, in her fatness, in the blaze of her jewels, recalled nothing so much as some Eastern idol. She had the same air of plethoric complacency, and sat in the same immovability to be worshipped. At the moment that Signor Renzo and his partner approached her, she was engaged in the deliberate consumption of an ice. A circle of devotees watched this sublime operation respectfully.

The last spoonful was swallowed, and, presumably, a barely perceptible flicker in the eyelet holes set above the putty of the Princess's cheeks, conveyed to the lookers-on that she wished to be relieved of the empty saucer.

Two or three gentlemen precipitated themselves, but the honour fell to Count Cioronski. Only he was hurried, and seized the glass with his left hand.

"Let me put it down for you," said the urbane tones of Signor Renzo, behind him. "Have you hurt your other hand?" he added, in sympathetic inquiry.

"Monsieur!" exclaimed the Count haughtily, and shot at the officious stranger a withering glance.

"That was a very unfortunate inspiration of yours," laughingly said Hildegarde, as she hurried the young man away. "He is left-handed, but nothing makes him so angry as for people to remark it."

"People are not blind. I was sure that I had noticed it myself at the trial," answered Signor Renzo, and the Gräfin noticed with surprise that he had actually turned pale.

"I find it difficult to believe," said the King's Proctor.

"To me it seems that nothing can well be clearer," replied Signor Renzo, calmly. "His sister-in-law's own statement, made to a number of people, proves that she wrote such letters to the Count as would

keep up in him a constant irritation against his wife. The man-servant, whom I have hunted up and interrogated, can testify that on the very morning of the murder the Count received a letter which seemed to disturb him greatly. The servant saw him reading it, and noticed the effect produced. Of course, he would not guess that it referred to the Countess, but we have very good reason to suppose that it did. The cook also now relates that while the servants were at dinner on the same day, he, looking down into his master's bedroom through the open window of the kitchen (placed, as you may remember, in the upper storey and on the opposite side of the court), saw Count Cioronski rush out of his wife's bedroom into his own, with the gesture and air of a man violently excited. Between the extra quantity of wine which he had drunk, the agitation of the murder, and the general conviction of the painter's guilt, the cook thought no more of this incident until cross-examined by me."

"And to what, do you think, does it point?"

"To the strong probability of a quarrel between husband and wife, just at the time when the servants were not there to witness it. I pass now to the curious coincidence of the Count's left-handedness, with the conclusion so strongly suggested by the position of the sofa and the manner in which the door opens: namely, that the pistol was fired with the left hand."

Here the King's Proctor interrupted with some irritation.

"That is the weakest point of your argument," he said. "You assume, in spite of probability, that the murderer was standing in the lumber-room, and fired from behind the door. Next, that he escaped through the other exit of the same room on to the landing, and down the dark staircase past the deaf porter's lodge. We assume, *from the disappearance of the jewels*, that he was in the same room with his victim, and after murdering her fled through the antechamber door. Our assumption, to say the least of it, is more plausible than yours."

Signor Renzo leaned back in his chair with the quietly triumphant expression of a man about to play his trump-card.

"I do not agree with you," he said. "For Count Cioronski, immediately after the report of the pistol had echoed through the house, was met creeping stealthily down stairs in the dark, by a man who was ascending with the purpose of asking for money."

The lawyer then rapidly related how Tito, failing to find his friend, had thought of applying to the Countess; had hurried to her dwelling, and entered it just as the shot was fired; had brushed against a person descending; had struck a light, and recognised the Count. The latter, in an agitated manner, asked him his business, and on learning it emptied his purse into his hand, and promised him future help on the express condition that he should never reveal the secret of their meeting.

"Umph!" said the King's Proctor.

He would not have owned to it for the world, but, secretly, he was

rather inclined to resent the unearthing of a new criminal, when one had been tried and comfortably condemned already.

"We will set the detectives at work, and try to obtain some trace of the jewels," he said, and rose to put an end to the interview.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

Now it so happened that while Signor Renzo was endeavouring to bring a conviction of Count Cioronski's guilt home to the mind of the King's Proctor, Count Cioronski himself was lying very ill at an hotel in Naples, whither he had repaired immediately after the ball. He had not been there three days when he took the fever, and was for some weeks unable to rise. During this time one of the waiters at the hotel was particularly attentive to him, and when convalescent the Count felt the necessity of making him some present.

But fitful in everything, Cioronski was one of those people who are generous and avaricious by turns. With the prospect of a doctor's and a nurse's bill before him, he felt but a small inclination to spend. After some meditation, consequently, he sent for a jeweller. That person came and was introduced into the Count's room, without being the least aware of the extraordinary interest which he had excited in an unpretending-looking stranger who had been hanging for some days about the neighbourhood of the hotel. A loafer the more at Naples—who dreams of observing him?

The Count showed the jeweller a beautiful sapphire ring, set in filigree gold and pearls. He wished to have the sapphire removed, he said, and mounted as a pin. The jeweller took the commission, and promised the pin for the next day but one; then obsequiously bowed himself out. He was followed to his shop by the stranger, who had a little conversation with him, and inspected the ring.

The same evening a telegram conveyed a description of that object to the incredulous King's Proctor, and worked a change in his opinions.

It followed that Count Cioronski was arrested for the murder of his wife, whose missing jewels were found in a secret drawer of his dressing-case.

He fell into a condition of the most abject agitation on finding himself discovered, and made an incoherent but tolerably full confession of his crime.

The circumstances were much as Signor Renzo had imagined them. The husband and wife had a furious quarrel while the servants were upstairs at dinner. Wanda, worked to frenzy by her husband's taunts, and further enraged by being told that he would no longer take her to Switzerland, declared her intention of leaving him forthwith.

Sneeringly reminded that she was without money, and that the greater part of her jewels were in his own strong-box, she pointed to the watch and rings upon the toilet table. Upon this Cioronski quietly gathered up the things and put them into his pocket. Beside herself, Wanda seized the loaded pistol and turned its muzzle to her temple. Her husband wrested it from her, and put that also into one of the side pockets of his coat. Up to this moment he appears to have been calm—maliciously so, in fact. But as the quarrel raged on, his poor, semi-distraught mind grew more excited. When at last he rushed down stairs and out into the stifling heat of the moonlit streets, his brain, he admitted, "seemed on fire."

To the diseased suspiciousness of his mood, then, every smallest circumstance became fraught with a new significance. He saw Guido hurrying in the direction of the palazzo, and instantly conceived that his object was to visit Wanda. Sometime before, with a morbid cunning only half-conscient of its own motives, secretly he had had the lock of the lumber-room cleaned. He carried the key about with him, curiously exultant over the unsuspected power of entrance which it gave him.

Following Guido at a cautious distance, he watched him enter; then, going round to the back of the palazzo, he mounted the dark staircase, and introducing himself into the lumber-room, disposed himself to listen. Twenty minutes elapsed, but no sound broke the stillness. Softly opening the bedroom door then, he put in his head. Wanda was lying on the sofa, where she had thrown herself sobbing like an angry child not an hour before.

Her head, pillowed on her arm, rose above the back of the couch. From a bracket above the light of a shaded lamp fell full upon her. But for the moonlight the rest of the large room was in semi-darkness. Cioronski watched her for a little, and the hatred he had against her at times grew stronger in his heart. He fingered the loaded revolver in his pocket. One idea began to take possession of him with an awful fascination. The intense stillness, the uncanny light of the huge old room increased his excitement. Doubtless his strange outburst of murderous fury against Lucia the very next day was but the after-swell of the tempest that surged up in him now. All at once, with a terrible swiftness (as men have been known to throw themselves from some giddy height), he drew the weapon from his pocket and cocked it. At the same instant he accidentally shook the door. Wanda, startled, sprang up; but before she could turn, the revolver had been fired, then thrown into the room, and Cioronski the next moment found himself once again on the stairs.

His meeting there with Tito recalled him to a full sense of the danger of his position. From that instant all the cunning of madness came into play in him. He went back quickly to his home, and in the indescribable confusion and alarm which reigned there in the

first half-hour, found no difficulty in returning the key to its old place on the wall. When Guido was arrested he breathed freely. As for his strange behaviour at the trial, that may have been caused in part by a demented hatred of Guido, as well as by mere terror of the consequences to himself were the painter not convicted.

A few days after his arrest Cioronski had a return of the epileptic malady from which he had suffered in a mild form when a child, but which had only shown itself again in him after his wife's death. But a few weeks elapsed before he was removed from prison to an asylum, where he died a raving lunatic.

Meanwhile the law, with maddening delay, with endless expenditure of stamped paper, red-tape, and talk, was unweaving the web which it had drawn round Guido. For in Italy a man whom the tribunals have branded as a criminal, cannot be released from one day to another, even when the sentence pronounced against him is proved to be unmerited.

So that many weary weeks and even months elapsed before the order for release came, and Guido, the ghost of himself, sought refuge and consolation in Lucia's pitying arms.

In after years, Lucia often looked back to that meeting, and though in wifehood and motherhood her lot was a happy one, still she felt that nothing, *nothing* in her life again could equal the fulness of that moment's perfect joy.

For we purchase our highest happiness with a heavy burden of pain; our most steadfast trust is born of many illusions, first cherished, then renounced; and on the altars of our inmost soul the records of eternal faith and hope are written with the heart's best blood. And no brow on which the crown of thorns has not rested once is ever lifted with the one supreme emotion of thankfulness to the lasting glory of the sunlight, or the peaceful benediction of the stars.

OUR PHILOSOPHER.

By Anne Beale.

PHILOSOPHERS have often been troubled with shrewish helpmates. Socrates had his Xantippe, the judicious Hooker his Joan. As Isaac Walton says in his life of the latter: "Providence allows not the race to the swift, nor bread to the wise, nor good wives to good men; and He that can bring good out of evil only knows why this blessing was denied to patient Job, to meek Moses, and to our as meek and patient Hooker."

Providence, also, only knew why it was denied to Azy Morgans, schoolmaster, a man as meek and patient as they.

Azy—biblically Azariah—was a philosopher; his wife, Tisher—euphonically Letitia—a cecrâd. Now, cecrâd is the vernacular for scold, and she was known as Tisher Cecrâd. Not that people called her so to her face; they were too cautious for that. Fear ties the tongue of those who talk to a shrew. Azy was wont to call her Santip, and not even the parson knew that he meant Xantippe. But he was humorous, and chuckled over his own joke as great men will. It consoled him when she washed him out of the kitchen, or swept him in a cloud of dust from the schoolroom.

Corporeally he was a little man, she a big woman, so physical resistance was vain; his mental superiority she did not understand. He wondered why he had married her, and why little men always did marry big women. But having "taken her for worse," he knew that he must put up with it; for in those times "incompatibility of temper" was no excuse for divorce or even separation. Married people were obliged to bear with one another, however intolerable the burden.

"You a schoolmaster, and not be ruling your own wife! Shame for you!" his friend Nadolig, clerk, would say, who had his womankind in subjection.

"'Tis for my good—and she's so big," would be the answer.

So he kept out of her way, and took to study. Books were a better refuge than the alehouse, and he drank in their contents, as less philosophic husbands drink beer. And it must be confessed he was often muddled by his beverage.

He was confused by classical words and their pronounciation, as he expressed it, and his head ached with over-cramming. The English language troubled him. He began life when there were no national schools, and when, if he blundered, it was in Welsh. When the laws bade him teach English, his heart ached as well as his head, for he believed his mother tongue the finest in the world. Nevertheless, he

acted as a philosopher, and made the best of it. He would, however, occasionally complain to the Vicar.

"All sound and no sense, sir," he would say. "The children have ears and eyes, and learn by sound and sight. They read, and don't understand. Just as well teach colts and calves."

"But you have capital English, Azy," consoled the Vicar.

"I am doing my best, sir. But there is Nadolig, clerk, who is arguing with me about the pronounciation, till one would think he was born in London. He, indeed! who is calling it 'The Combination Service,' and saying, 'A light to lighten the *Genteels.*'"

"Oh, Azy; we talk better English than the cockneys," said the Vicar, who rather looked down on the citizens, as country-people will. "But what were those mistakes the children made?"

"Why, sir, I asked Mary Jones, saddler, the other day, what is 'To fare sumptuously?' and she answered, 'Rice pudding with currants.'"

"And a very good fare, too, Azy, when it is well boiled. What else?" said the Vicar.

"I had been explaining faith to Ben Jenkins, Red Cow, by various illustrations in English and Welsh, and then, says I, 'Now, what is faith, Ben?' 'Toffy, sir,' says he."

"Ha, ha! Any other eatable?" laughed the Vicar.

"I put it to Jonathan, The White Horse, 'What are human beings?' and he did answer quite smart, 'I am knowing broad beans, and kidney beans, but not human beans.'"

"I am afraid you teach them through their stomachs, Azy," said the Vicar.

"By no means, sir. They think in Welsh and answer in English. I was giving a little exposition of ancient history one day, and says I, of a sudden, 'Now, Nanno Bryngoch, what's the female of hero?' 'Shero,' cries she, quite imperative."

"And very shrewd, too. Why, Azy, man, they're getting on in their English. Anything else?"

"Well, sir, perhaps 'twas a difficult question, but then I asked her what was ramparts? 'A place to keep rams in,' answers she, like a shot."

"Shrewd girl, that Nanno Bryngoch. We're a clever people, Azy. Tell me another story."

"I'm ashamed to say that I put the question to Martha, the Shop, 'Why were Adam and Eve turned out of Paradise?' and her answer was, 'To clean it.'"

"Cat after kind, Azy. Why, her mother turns her out twenty times a day to clean up," said the Vicar, with a hearty laugh. "We shall have a good report, after all, when the Examiner comes."

"Ah! when he comes!" sighed Azy; for the Examiner was his nightmare. "Why, sir, the children don't understand a word he says. How should they? He asks questions as long and hard as a crocodeel."

"And your words are none of the shortest, Azy," said the Vicar.

"But you will allow they are pertinent, sir. Now the Examiner's are impertinent."

Azy meant nothing disrespectful by this. He used the word in dictionary form, as irrelevant, or not pertaining to the matter in hand; and it must be confessed that, in this sense, Examiners are often impertinent enough.

Azy, however, consoled himself with study. But our schoolmaster was not content with biblical lore. He soon took to general literature. The Vicar, himself a scholar, gave him the run of his library, and his head got fuller and fuller of hard words. It became a sort of curiosity shop, in which they tumbled over one another, or were huddled up in odd corners. But then, are not the heads of many learned men curiosity shops?

In course of time he sent essays and poems to the newspapers and periodicals. It is not surprising if they were returned, or not inserted, since genius is rarely acknowledged till its possessor is celebrated, and editors are not infallible. But he occasionally triumphed at an Eisteddfod, which consoled him. To be invested with a ribbon as druid or bard was distinction enough for this meek philosopher.

Unfortunately Tisher had no sympathy with him, not being herself "invested." On the contrary, her tempers increased with his talents, and she was seen to drive him from his desk, during a moment of inspiration, with a leg of mutton.

"Take you care of our Sunday dinner, Santip," he said humbly.

"Santip, indeed! Dinner for you! You are doing nothing but eat. Every time the wind is blowing into your mouth, you're hungry."

"He, he! A good joke, Santip! Nothing so appetising as teaching and composition!" cried Azy, making his escape before the leg of mutton fell.

"Mean-spirited, cowardly little fool!" she cried, pursuing.

"Why were you marrying such a man then, Tisher?" asked a bystander.

"He's a sight better than none; and it's no business of yours!" was her indignant answer, as she disappeared with her leg of mutton.

No one longed for a quiet life more ardently than Azy; but finding that he could not get it, he consoled himself with the recollection of Socrates and the judicious Hooker. The example of the latter made him ambitious of becoming a clergyman. He remembered that Welsh ordinations had taken place from grammar schools not so long ago, and that the men ordained had not been superior to himself in the matter of education. Moreover, the learned bishop had been known to ordain literates or *il*-literates, as Azy chose to consider some of them. He consulted Nadolig, clerk, who said, with eyes and hands uplifted:

"You a parson! Look at Tisher! 'A deacon must rule his own wife, or how shall he take care of the church.'"

"St. Paul doesn't say rule his wife, and he wasn't a married man," replied Azy; but he saw the force of the argument, and relinquished his purpose with a sigh.

Easter Monday was the one quiet day of his stormy year, and he looked forward to it with pleasant expectation. He habitually marshalled his school to Trefavon, there to meet the other schools of the district, and unite with them in friendly competition. The Vicar usually accompanied them, and as Tisher preferred remaining at home, it was ever a white day to Azy. It was then the little philosopher discoursed volubly, and that third-class carriages re-echoed to sacred song and intellectual discourse. Anthems rolled off with the white smoke of the engine, and floated over hill and valley, while bright faces gazed from the windows on the green woods, ruined castle, and winding river.

Arrived at Trefavon, he and the Vicar accompanied their flock to the church on the hill, where, together with other shepherds and flocks from far and near, they found the fold prepared. It was pleasant to see it soon fill with young and old. The Welsh love and reverence Holy Scripture, and the old did not weary of the long chapters repeated in rhythmical chorus by the young, nor of the anthems and hymns sung by class after class. The Welsh are endowed with the gift of music, and the repetition in monotone, as well as the singing of the fine old sacred songs, was ever harmonious. From these and similar gatherings sprang men and women who had talent enough to master Handel, and hence the choirs of working people—of colliers, miners, ploughmen—which, united, formed the great Welsh choir that won the challenge cup at the Crystal Palace, and sang before royalty itself.

As time went on, Azy had an occasional sugar-plum thrown into the oatmeal porridge of his life. On one occasion he was the successful competitor for an essay on "The Heroes of Wales" at a national Eisteddfod, and even Tisher was proud when the bells of Llanfach rang in his honour.

We have said that Azy was fond of children, though they tormented him sorely. One of the small pleasures of his over-tasked existence was to aid his pupils in the manufacture of their orchards for New Year's Day. The English have their Christmas-boxes, the French their étrennes, the Welsh their orchards. The custom is pretty, curious, and characteristic. A large rosy apple is impaled on three skewers, like a three-legged stool, and surmounted by holly, box, and other evergreens. This is again festooned by strings of holly-berries, and the apple is almost lost sight of in its adornments. Nevertheless, it stands steadily on its tripod, and bravely bears the burden ruthlessly stuck into it, reminding the beholder of the head of an Indian chief.

On New Year's Day the children have the best of it, which is not always the case with the poor, if it is with the rich. Furnished with

an orchard, they get, for once in the year at least, more halfpence than cuffs; for the orchard asks for them a New Year's gift. It is pretty to see the bright red faces of the youngsters laughing through the holly-berries, and to hear their "Happy New Year," as they bob and curtsey appealingly. The country swarms with them, and, as it is their day, they are permitted guests everywhere. Country and farm-houses are assailed by little people in scarlet and gray cloaks, or red mufflers, bearing these pleaders in their hands; and the towns and villages are besieged.

One benevolent country squire was in the habit of hoarding every penny he received from New Year to New Year, so that he had a goodly canvas bagful ready for the flocks of youngsters that came, like the robins, for his crumbs. And he had not a sous too many. Another kept open hall for young and old, and assuredly his hall was full enough.

But if there could be one day on which Tisher was more aggressive than another, it was New Year's Day.

"Let them as makes the dust sweep. I'll not be cleaning after you," she exclaimed on one occasion, stalking into the schoolroom where Azy sat, surrounded by evergreens, apples, holly, skewers, and children.

"I am only helping with their orchards, Santip. Look you, what a beauty we are making for you!" said Azy, holding up an elaborate structure of wreaths and chains.

"There's for you!" cried Tisher, knocking it out of his hand, and destroying the orchard, to the indignation of his scholars.

"We'll not be making you another, Santip," was all that Azy said.

And he little thought that his words would prove true. Before the day was over Tisher was seized with a fit; her friends said, "In the midst of her tempers." Azy was roaming about, rather disconsolately, it must be confessed, composing an ode to the new year, when a neighbour summoned him. He found Tisher speechless for the first time in her life. Although he had not unfrequently wished her dumb, he now prayed heartily that her tongue might be loosed. But his prayers were not answered for many a day. Although apparently conscious, she was some weeks before she could make her wants and sufferings known. During this period her husband tended her with the patience of an Ænid or a Godiva—we remember no masculine hero so forgiving and gentle. He had his reward, for when, at last, Tisher slowly recovered her speech, she asked his pardon for her misdemeanours.

"I'll be different when I'm about again," she said with difficulty.

"The sooner the better," returned Azy, referring to the purposed recovery, not the improvement.

"Hach! Why were you calling me Santip?" she inquired.

"Santip was a great lady, wife of Socraits, the philosopher," replied Azy, evasively and penitently.

Tisher was satisfied, but Azy never forgave himself for his one offence.

"I wish I had never called her Santip," he repeated continually to himself.

Thus the best of us repent when the end approaches.

"She's so meek I'm afraid she's going," he said one day to his friend Nadolig.

"The Lord has His ways of teaching us our duty," replied the clerk sententiously. "She is learning that the woman must be in subjection."

"I'm sure she may be master and welcome, if only she'll get better," returned Azy.

The Vicar was more sympathetic than his clerk, and visited penitent Tisher almost daily. But, although he was himself a widower, he could not understand Azy's distress at his wife's state; for any condition seemed to him preferable to Tisher's normal one.

"You a philosopher, and unable to submit to the course of events!" he remarked.

"The house is so quiet, sir. I never knew her silent before except in her sleep, and then she was talking at times."

"No accounting for taste, Azy," smiled the Vicar.

"Perhaps it's rather custom than taste, sir," said Azy, reflectively, for he was a philosopher indeed.

And he proved himself so as time went on. He accustomed himself to Tisher as she lay helpless, much as he had done to the more energetic phase of their married life. She could not now bear him out of her sight, and he therefore pursued his studies in her presence. He quieted her nerves by reading aloud to her, alternately, chapters of Holy Writ and his own compositions; and it sometimes tickled his vanity to be asked which was which, and to hear from the once uncomplimentary lips,

"There's clever you are, Azy, *bach!*"

When those lips were closed for ever, and Azy had read his last chapter and last prayer to her who had certainly been a thorn in his side rather than his better half, his philosophy did not desert him.

When Nadolig, clerk, came to condole with him, and to quote texts of Scripture concerning death and immortality, he only said, quietly:

"We must be resigned."

And when Nadolig returned in the evening, his face and mind composed for sympathy, Azy added meekly:

"I am resigned now."

The following morning he was at his post in the schoolroom, and his scholars, who had expected a holiday, had a homily instead.

Azy comported himself becomingly at the funeral, which was a large one, but it was observed that he shed no tears.

"How should he? 'Tis a fine day for him," remarked an unsympathetic neighbour.

"You'll be marrying again, soon?" suggested a kind friend during the ensuing week.

"One marriage is enough for one man in one life, and there's no giving in marriage in the other," replied Azy.

He resumed his customary avocations with even more than his customary vigour. He had no one to interfere with him, so he taught, composed, and dug his garden vigorously, recovering his spirits as philosophically as he lost them.

One day his scholars were much terrified by the apparition of Tisher, at whose disappearance they had rejoiced.

"Look you there! I see her by there in the garden!" they said to one another, as they stood trembling at the school-house gate, and pointing to a figure that greatly resembled Tisher.

The news spread that Tisher's ghost had been seen, but it evolved shortly that the ghost was a scarecrow, dressed in her clothes, and placed by Azy in his garden. True philosopher! He considered that in the garments she had left behind her a portion of her spirit remained, and they might frighten the crows as she had frightened him. But this produced an unpremeditated complication.

Azy had been heard to say that he wished he had a likeness of Tisher, for "she was as fine an 'ooman as there was in Wales."

"Send you me her best clothes, and we'll see!" said clever Nadolig: and the clothes were sent.

Photography had just found its way into the wilds, and an itinerant photographer had appeared at Trefavon. He was fabled then to do what the Spiritualists profess now actually to perform; so Nadolig sought him, furnished with Tisher's best hat and gown, and accompanied by his daughter.

"Tak you me Tisher Cecrâd. I'll be describing her face, and here's her clothes," he said authoritatively.

The photographer explained that his art had not reached that stage of perfection as yet, and proposed that Nadolig's daughter should sit instead. The clerk was not a man to be daunted by obstacles; so, after a little reflection, he told his child to put on Tisher's clothes.

"Stand you her on a stool, and make her three times as big as she is, and maybe she'll do," he said pompously.

The photographer obeyed to the best of his ability, and when Nadolig returned home with this remarkable representation in daguerrotype, even Azy exclaimed with everybody else:

"There's wonderful! It's Tisher when she was a girl. And just like Mary, Nadolig, too."

Nadolig formally presented it to Azy, who hung it up in a conspicuous part of his kitchen, and was flattered to hear his friends say:

"There's slim and pretty Tisher was when she was young."

So Azy consoled himself with his photograph, his books, his school, and his philosophy, and was happier as widower than as Benedick.

WINNIFRED DEE.

A TRUE story, and dealing with a homely girl in an obscure district; but one that happened not long ago.

The sweet May sunshine fell in golden rays upon the street of Rillbrook that drowsy Sunday morning, and the grass of the meadows around looked bright and soft as green velvet, and the heart of Winnifred Dee throbbed with a nameless joy and happiness as she shut her shop door and walked towards the church, for she dearly loved the sunshine. The church was the only place of worship the village contained; and people of all sects, Episcopalians and Dissenters alike, assembled there upon the sabbath, to listen to the word of God and to gossip amidst themselves after service.

It was not a poor village or filled with labourers. Its inhabitants were fairly well-off; they lived in pretty villas, and set up for being of note in the world. Widows and spinsters of a certain age, of limited incomes but unlimited gentility, congregated within its small walls; all they had to do on earth was to call on one another and tattle through the livelong day, and no end of backbiting went on in whispers. Even on their way to church it must be indulged.

"There she goes!" exclaimed the young Widow Thompson (not yet forty) to the two Miss Downs. "Just look at her! A brown silk gown on! a *silk*, if you'll believe me! *Golden* brown."

"And last Sunday it was a new summer muslin, pink and white," said Miss Jane Down. "The curious thing is, how does the girl contrive to buy them?"

"Ah," groaned Miss Eliza Down, "how? On Friday last, I went in to buy some quilling, and she had a heap of ribbon in her hair, *mauve;* she had, indeed. And when—oh! oh! do look! There's Mr. Probert stopping to speak to her. He is shaking hands—oh, I could scream! What a shame!"

"*She* stopped *him*, Eliza," corrected Miss Jane, severely. "I could see that much from here. He really must be lost to all sense of propriety. To shake hands with a milliner!"

"And one who serves in a shop," added Miss Eliza. "That brown silk has five flounces to it—just count them, Mrs. Thompson. And she has tacked lace cuffs on the sleeves! Oh, she is a designing young woman!"

The object of these reproaches was Winnifred Dee. For some little time past Miss Dee had been, unconsciously to herself, raising the demon of rancour in Rillbrook. These ladies were about to pray for deliverance from envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, while they and many of their sisterhood were indulging it freely in their hearts.

The former milliner of Rillbrook was a Mrs. James: a superior, obliging woman, who was liked by her customers. She had a small shop also, selling ribbons, artificial flowers, feathers, lace, and other such articles pertaining to her trade. Four years ago there appeared behind her counter, one fine summer's morning, a charming-looking, ladylike girl of eighteen, dressed in deep mourning. Rillbrook found out that she was a Miss Dee, the only child of a land-surveyor who had recently died, and who had been distantly related to Mrs. James. Mr. Dee had died comparatively young and quite unexpectedly, and had not been able to make any provision for his daughter. "You must come to me, Winnifred," wrote Mrs. James: and Winnifred came accordingly.

She was very pretty, very pleasant, lively and sweet-tempered, and had been well-educated; and from that time she remained with Mrs. James, having no other home.

"She is a dear, good girl, very grateful to me," Mrs. James would say confidentially to her customers, "though I know the millinery business rubs against her notions, and especially the shop and having to serve in it. Her father was a scholar and well connected, you see, ladies, and her mother was a clergyman's daughter: but Winnifred has good sense; and having brought her mind to submit to circumstances, she does it cheerfully. And I think she will make as nice a bonnet, in time, as I can; if not a better."

So, perforce, as it seemed, Winnifred Dee became a milliner, and served the ladies of Rillbrook. Everybody liked her; liked her much. She was merry-hearted, sunny-mannered; and if she forgot to say "ma'am" as often as she ought, it was found excusable, she not having been "to the manner born."

At the end of two years Mrs. James died, and the business fell to Miss Dee. For one year after that she was patronized and countenanced: and then a change set in. It had occurred to her to add a small circulating library to her business, which was not very profitable: Rillbrook being but a small place, and some of its ladies making one bonnet serve for a year and three-quarters. The library involved the changing of books, and brought a new element into the shop in the shape of a young man now and then. This would have given no offence; men, young or old, being at liberty to read; but, unfortunately, they did not only change the books: they admired and talked to Miss Dee.

It set the ladies of Rillbrook against her. She had a beautiful face, and her address was charming; and men, especially eligible ones, were not so plentiful in the village that they could be spared to Miss Dee. Animosity grew strong, culminating at length in the discovery that Mr. Probert had gone over to the enemy, and might often be seen in the shop.

For Mr. Probert, the surgeon and general practitioner, was considered the most eligible match in Rillbrook. A genial, warm-

hearted man, who drove his gig, with a head to it for wet weather, and who was a widower with one little girl, and fairly well-off apart from his practice. He was all the rage. Young ladies set their ribbons at him, middle-aged maidens and widows regarded him as peculiarly their own, for was he not approaching his fortieth year, and who could be so suitable as a lady of his own age to be made the second Mrs. Probert. And when it became known that he had taken to frequent Miss Dee's shop, indignation abounded. "What an extraordinary person she must be to allow it!" cried Miss Eliza Down. "Quite a creature!"

"How is it that Mr. Probert is dancing here perpetually?" demanded an old lady, stern and venomous, one day that she had gone in to order a cap.

"My assistant, Martha White, is ill, ma'am," replied Winnifred.

"Ill!" returned the dame, who had three single daughters who had left their teens behind them for many a year. "Why, I see her sitting there at work," pointing to the inner room.

"Yes, she is getting better, but her cough and chest are very bad still. Mr. Probert is anxious about her."

"Anyway, she looks well enough to me," retorted the ungracious dame. "And let me see some other sort of net; I don't like this flimsy stuff."

Martha White recovered, and time went on; but Mr. Probert did not give up his objectionable habit of running in and out of Miss Dee's shop. Jemima Raddle, daughter of the late Major Raddle, who lived in the rooms over the stationer's shop opposite, upon a very small income, declared she had known him stay talking to Miss Dee for ten minutes at a stretch, which she considered most reprehensible. That Winnie Dee!

Matters were in this uncomfortable state on this summer's day; this warm, still, bright Sunday, when the sun shone and the skies were blue, and the congregation was on its way to church. Mr. Probert had shaken hands with Winnie Dee in the eyes and face of all the street, and was now walking by her side. Mrs. Thompson, looking on, would have liked to hurl a stone at her; the Miss Downs felt fit to faint. "So disgraceful," they murmured; "*so* disgraceful."

The curious part of it was that the poor young girl, innocent and inoffensive, had not yet gathered the smallest knowledge of the commotion that the public had set up, or was aware that she was losing favour. True, she had lately noticed that some ladies, when they came in, were not so free and pleasant with her as they used to be; but she never supposed the fault could lie in herself, or that she had given any sort of offence. She walked down the street now by the Doctor's side, her pretty face turned to him in conversation, the rose pink on her cheeks rather deeper than usual, from the haste she had made in getting ready. She had had a hard week's work, and had sat up late at night to get it done. New bonnets had been

wanted, shabby hats had to be cleaned and trimmed, caps that did not suit (their owners never thinking that the unbecomingness lay in the old faces and not in the caps) had come back to be altered; and, beyond all this, she had made up this silk gown for herself. A lovely silk it was, a true golden brown, as the Miss Downs had remarked. They thought it was new—had wondered "how she got it." Winnifred could have told them, had they asked her, that it once belonged to Mrs. James; she had bought it to attend a wedding, and she, Winnie, had now made it up for herself. A new, fresh silk it looked upon her, trimmed at the throat and wrists with bits of pillow lace, and fitting the graceful figure to perfection—as did all her garments. She was well and modestly and becomingly attired, from the small straw bonnet with its shaded ribbons, to the well-fitting brown gloves and the neat black kid boots. To dress neatly and nicely is an instinct with some women, and it was with Winnifred.

She took her seat in the accustomed pew, and Mr. Probert walked on to his own. Those near her saw that she looked unusually lovely, with her pure profile and the heightened colour on her cheeks. Mr. Probert, as a medical man of discernment, did not like that bright colour; sometimes it looked so very much like hectic. She was too pretty this morning for the ladies to look at, except from the corners of their eyes; with those eyes they jotted down items of her looks and manner in their memories, to be talked of after service.

"Plenty of style at church to-day, Jemima!" cried Miss Jane Down ironically to her friend Miss Raddle, as they walked out of the churchyard, and she gave an expressive glance at the slender figure before them.

Miss Jemima tossed her head. "Indeed, yes. Fine feathers make fine birds. That silk must have cost a pretty penny."

"Just the remark we made before church. I think she might have contented herself with a plainer colour, if she must needs have a silk. Eliza says ——"

"And with one less rich," came the impatient interruption. "I wonder where the girl gets the money from to dress as she does?"

"Oh, in making bonnets and caps, of course." It was a harmless sentence, this, which fell from Miss Jane Down's lips; yet her manner and voice were so peculiar, her laugh so meaning, that the two women looked at each other and exchanged glances.

"Winnie Dee is a hard-working girl, and I think she means well," observed a lady who had overtaken them, Mrs. Curlew. "But I do not approve of her dressing as she does, in silks, and laces, and dainty bonnets; and I think it must be done from a reprehensible motive—that of attracting the admiration of young men—and that she is vain and frivolous."

"Oh, mother, I think you misjudge her," spoke up Alice Curlew, who was as unsophisticated as her father, the retired sailor-captain. "I have never seen anything the least bit wrong in Winnifred Dee. She was well born, you know—and she can't help being pretty."

"*Do* you think her pretty, Alice!" cried Miss Jane Down. "*I* don't. She has a good complexion; but her features are no better than other people's, that I see."

Alice laughed. "Mr. Probert thinks they are, I fancy. See! he has joined her; and I saw he came with her to church."

Miss Jane's face turned of an agreeable lead colour. It was true: Mr. Probert, nodding to one and another, as he passed quickly through the throng, had again halted by the side of that objectionable girl. He walked by her up the street, shook hands with her at her own door, and left her with a pleasant laugh.

Nothing less than a bombshell seemed to have fallen on the indignant women of Rillbrook as they witnessed it.

But one can't altogether scathe a young woman to death because a middle-aged doctor is seen shaking hands with her in the street, or chatting to her while he changes a book in her little library. The feminine portion of Rillbrook went about with upturned noses and dissatisfied tongues; but they did no worse. And thus the weeks went on, and September came in.

One day in that auspicious month of lovely foliage, Miss Down, having received some rents due to her, paid Mr. Probert his account for medical attendance, which had been running for two years. It came to five pounds, and she handed him a bank note for that amount, having first of all placed her initials upon it and noted down its number, Miss Eliza Down being methodical in all her ways.

This was on a Thursday. On the afternoon of the following day, Friday, Miss Jane Down called at the milliner's, to settle for their summer bonnets, and found Miss Dee at work in the little parlour behind. She came forward, trim and neat as usual, and smilingly pretty.

"You are all by yourself!" exclaimed Miss Jane, who would have held a gossip with the deuce himself, failing a more eligible party, rather than forego it. "Where's Martha White to-day?"

"I have let her go home for a fortnight," replied Winnifred. "She needed a holiday, poor girl."

"Do you mean to take one yourself?"

Winnifred laughed, showing her pearly teeth. "I should like to—oh, so much!—and I have an invitation. But I don't know."

"Who has invited you?" unceremoniously questioned Miss Jane.

"A cousin of my father's; a lady who lives in Cumberland. Still, ma'am, I don't think I can go. There would be the expense, for one thing. I am not sure, too—and this is my chief difficulty—whether Martha White could manage the business during my absence, or whether I ought to leave her here alone. Mr. Probert wants me to go; he says I ought to."

Miss Jane Down nearly dropped her purse. "*Who* says that, do you say?"

"Mr. Probert, ma'am."

"Very strange!" remarked Miss Jane, in strong suspicion. "Why should he say such a thing to you. What business is it of his?"

Winnifred Dee, measuring off two yards of brown ribbon, destined for the adornment of Miss Jane's hair, looked up for a moment, rather surprised at the acrid tone. "Mr. Probert thinks I am not very strong, Miss Jane," was her answer; "he says a little change would do me good."

Miss Jane Down drew in her lips and vouchsafed no further familiarity. "The bill comes to forty-eight shillings, doesn't it?" she tartly asked.

"Yes, ma'am. Thirty-six shillings for the bonnets, four shillings and eightpence for the cuffs and collars, and ——"

"Oh! I know the items; you need not go over them," came the snarling interruption.

Silence ensued. Miss Jane Down was rummaging amid the pockets of her leather purse, apparently unable to pick out its coins. She ended by turning it upside down upon the counter, when two sovereigns were exposed to view.

"I never knew such a thing!" she exclaimed, speaking naturally in her perplexity. "I could have declared I put three sovereigns in before leaving home. Then I can't pay you to-day," she added. "I have nothing else with me except a ten-pound note; and I suppose you are not able to change that?"

"I think I can change it, if you wish, Miss Jane. But it does not in the least matter about paying me; that will do at any time."

"I'd be glad of the change, if you have it. I was going on to the post-office, to ask them to do it for me. You can take for the bill."

Miss Dee unlocked her cash-box; she handed out a five-pound note, and the rest of the change in gold and silver. Jane Down took up the note to scan it, as a matter of precaution, bad notes not being entirely unknown at Rillbrook; and then down she sat on the shop stool, and grew pale about the lips. It was the same note given by her sister only the previous day to Mr. Probert.

"Don't you feel well, ma'am?" cried the girl, seeing the pallor.

"Oh, I am well enough—only let me get out of here," retorted the lady.

Winnifred supposed she found the shop close, and made haste to receipt the bill. Miss Jane Down had been bent upon an afternoon's gadding to this place and the other place; but she tore back home wildly from the shop door.

"Eliza! Eliza!" she panted, bursting breathlessly into the parlour, where her sister was sitting. "Look at this note. Do you know it?"

Miss Down put on her spectacles—which she had taken to wear lately, though she would not have let Rillbrook know it for untold gold.

"Know it! Why, of course I know it. It is the one I gave Mr. Probert yesterday; here is my mark on it, 'E.D.' What brings you with it? It's good, I suppose?"

"*I—have—just—had—this—note—given—me—in—change; and —by—that—Dee—girl!*" returned the other, with slow enunciation and emphatic stress.

"Nonsense, Jane!"

"Eliza, it is true."

"But—what should bring Dee with the note I gave Mr. Probert?" cried Miss Down, too much bewildered to discern daylight.

"What, indeed! You may well ask."

The two sisters gazed into one another's eyes, obvious inferences beginning slowly to dawn upon Miss Eliza. To do her justice, they gave her a startling shock.

"Oh, Jane, what a dreadful thing!"

There are times when one feels apt to question whether some demon of mischief be not abroad in the world for the special purpose of heaping ill-luck upon its poor defenceless mortals. As if this one ill-fated suspicion were not sufficient to fall upon Winnifred Dee's devoted head, another was to supervene.

The following Wednesday night, late, Miss Jemima Raddle was seated at her window, over the stationer's, enjoying the moonlight; for she was of a pensive turn, like poor Kathleen O'Moore. Her mind ran on the dreadful scandal which, for the past few days, had been shaking Rillbrook with horror. For you may be sure the Miss Downs had not failed to talk in whispers, and how could Miss Jemima, despite pensive sentiment, help dwelling upon the thing, when the house stared her in the face over the narrow roadway.

"Of course *he* is to be pitied, poor gentleman," ran her thoughts. "Men, particularly professional men, are so unsuspicious. When a girl has a tolerably pretty face they never suspect she can be designing and wicked, and so they drop into her toils. Dear me! I did not think it was so late."

The church clock was striking eleven. Miss Jemima's soliloquy was not quite finished.

"Not but that some blame attaches to Probert. A doctor, and all, and holding a responsible position among us; and who —— There goes her light upstairs! She's going to bed, the hussy! And I suppose I must go myself, if I am to get any beauty sleep, so I may as well draw the curtain and light my candle: it seems a shame, though, to shut out this lovely moonlight. I wonder—my goodness! Who's that?"

The break off and the exclamation had been called forth by a sight outside. Walking rapidly down the street came a man in dark clothes, who halted at Miss Dee's door. When about to ring, he appeared to think better of it, came out to the middle of the road,

looked up at the light in the upstair casement window, went back, and rang gently. Then the light came down again and the door was opened to admit him. It was Charles Probert; and Miss Jemima, as she recognised him, felt as if a quart of cold water were trickling down her spine. That girl must be alone in the house, as Miss Jemima told herself. Martha White was away on her holiday, and the little maid-servant, Milly, was only there by day. Naturally but one inference could be drawn—that the Doctor was intending to devour her up, as the wolf devoured little Red Riding Hood's grandmother.

"And the skies don't fall to crush that viper of a girl!" passionately shrieked Miss Jemima, as she clasped her hands together, and drew her curtains with a bang, to shut out all unholy sights.

With the morning hours, the shameful scandal was abroad in Rillbrook, all the women whispering of it to one another. Not the men; it was kept from them: though, indeed, there were but few men to whisper to, for the inhabitants consisted mostly of the other sex. Mrs. Curlew repeated it to her husband; who had his virtues, but was given to rum-and-water and fits of passion; and he went into such a rage with her that she was fain to retract the news. Captain Curlew, in his indignant anger at what he called women's backbiting —especially at their backbiting that pretty, innocent, defenceless Winnie Dee—would have sallied forth to tell his friend Probert, but that the Doctor had gone off with early morning to attend a wedding at a distant farmhouse.

And Winnie Dee, sitting singing at her work in the pleasant little shop, knew nothing of this. Her conscience was clear, her mind pure, her heart light, and she never dreamed that the breath of slander was abroad to touch her fair fame. Charles Probert, drinking the bride's health at the wedding breakfast, knew nothing of it; neither then nor for many a day.

By-and-by Winnifred Dee fell to wondering why people looked so strangely at her; why they shunned her. Her custom fell off; the ladies did not come any more to buy ribbons and laces and flowers at her shop, or to order bonnets; if she met them in the street they turned their heads another way. The fashionable young girls, who used to come themselves to change their books, now sent a servant. She could not imagine how she had offended them; what it was that she had done.

The next thing was, that a new milliner was induced to come to the place, and she set herself up in the shop, then just vacated, underneath the rooms of Miss Jemima Raddle. Every woman in Rillbrook seemed to want new adornments, and crowded into it. Winnifred Dee watched them with a sinking heart.

One bitterly cold wintry day, when the white snow lay on the ground and the skies were gray and gloomy, her young servant's mother presented herself at the house, to say that she could not let the girl attend any more. Winnifred asked why: was Milly dis-

satisfied with anything? The mother said, "No; Milly was not dissatisfied: but she could not allow her to continue in a situation that had a bad name." Winnifred, shocked and frightened, questioned further; and though she could not hear anything tangible, she heard enough. One thing the woman said outright—that she was supposed to be "very familiar" with Dr. Probert.

And then Winnifred Dee knew what it all meant—that which had so puzzled her; knew why Rillbrook looked at her askance, and bought its bonnets elsewhere, and made a wide-spaced circle around her as she went to and from church, and altogether shunned her as one to be abandoned for ever. She knew that her good name had been assailed, though she did not know how, or why, or wherefore. And the rose faded out of her cheek, and the light from her eye, and her step grew listless and heavy: and again the dreary weeks dragged by.

Mr. Probert paid two visits to London about this time, so that he was much away. After that, a season of sickness set in; his patients absorbed all his thoughts and care, and he had no leisure for running into people's houses or shops for a friendly gossip. But one day, when Winnifred was out upon some indispensable errand, the Doctor happened to meet her. He felt half staggered at her changed appearance.

"Why, what is the matter?" he exclaimed. "You look ill."

"I am not very ill, thank you, Mr. Probert. I have had a bad cold."

"Is that all? It has made you pale and thin. I must call in and doctor you up."

"Oh, thank you, no! there is not any necessity," she answered, in a kind of hasty eagerness. "I shall soon get better."

"Perhaps you have been working too hard lately; or fretting about that opposition shop set up opposite? You must not do either. And be sure you let me know if you are ill. This weather is too cold for you to be out in."

He went striding off, for he was in a hurry: and Winnifred saw Miss Eliza and Miss Jane Down picking their way just then along the middle of the street, where the snow was thinnest, in their velvets and furs. They turned such condemning faces upon the poor young girl that her heart was scared.

That day she caught a fresh cold. The snow wet her boots and the boots wet her feet, and she had to take to her bed.

"Hadn't I better call in Mr. Probert?" asked Martha White, who was still at the shop, as per agreement, though there was no work to do in it.

"No, no," answered her young mistress. "I'd not trouble him for the world, or anybody else. I shall be better soon."

So Martha White, an incapable young woman, save at her work, did not call in any assistance. She concocted stews of gruel and arrowroot over the bedroom fire, and administered doses of cough

mixture; and the days went on. Winnifred got up again, and came downstairs; but she looked like a shadow, and her cough had a hollow sound.

"If I might but die!" she murmured in pain to her weary heart ten times a day; "if I might but die!"

A moment of inspiration took Martha White. Seeing the Doctor pass one afternoon, she ran out and asked him to step in: for indeed Winnifred's cough was getting beyond her.

"Not well?—can't eat?—coughs day and night!" echoed Mr. Probert, as he rubbed his boots, all muddy with the thaw, on the door-mat. "Not been taking care of herself, I suppose? Where is she?"

She was in the little room behind the shop, shivering over the fire; a shawl on her shoulders, and a cup of hot tea in her hand.

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. Probert, under his breath.

For he had not seen any face in the course of his practice look much more like a dying one than that looked. The cheeks had a hectic flush, the eyes were hollow. However, he sat down by her with a cheerful word, and put a few questions.

"Not very well! Indeed, I should think you are not. And now, tell me why you did not send to tell me."

"I—I don't suppose much can be done for me, and I did not like to trouble you," she answered, looking up at him with eyes so sad and weary that his heart ached for her.

"Do you cough much?"

"A great deal."

"Get pretty good rest at night?"

"Not much. I think it must be consumption," she suddenly added.

"Why do you think that?"

"Because I seem to be going just as my father went. He was apparently in the best of health, and he took cold, and consumption came on. It was very rapid; he died in less than six weeks. My symptoms are just like his—the cough, and the weakness, and the ——"

"All the more reason that you should have sent for me," interrupted Mr. Probert. "Do you want to die?"

She did not answer for a minute; Mr. Probert noted it in his mind. "My father had every possible medical aid, and it did not save him," was all she said.

"That cannot be any reason why we should not save you. What did your mother die of?"

"The same thing—consumption. They are better off."

"Have you anything on your mind?" resumed the shrewd Doctor, struck with her despairing look and hopeless tone.

She gave a faint gasp; her face turned deadly white. "Ah," said he, "I see there's something. Is it anything that you can tell to me?"

"No, sir; oh no! never to you," she answered; and her agitation was so great he could not say more: so he went on to examine her chest.

"I will send you in some medicine, Miss Dee; and I should recommend you not to get up to-morrow. You will be better in bed for a day or two," he added; "it will give you rest. To-morrow morning I will call in again, and I hope to find you better."

It was too late to save Winnifred Dee: Charles Probert said so to himself when he went out. He had a faint suspicion that she wanted to die: and he knew that when people get that idea into their heads to start with, and any serious disease supervenes, it is not always to be cured. Still he wished that he had been called in earlier: he might have warded off this consumption, though probably only for a time, as it appeared to be hereditary. What could it be that was troubling her?—the setting-up of that milliner opposite, threatening loss of custom? But no; he hardly thought that. As these ideas passed through his mind, he saw Mrs. Sims over the way, the Vicar's wife. For some months now this lady had been away from Rillbrook, having been seized with a dangerous illness while visiting her mother at a distance. The Vicar had spent a good part of every week with her, so that the sayings and doings of the parish had not reached his ears. They were at home now for good, and had just been regaled with the dainty dish of scandal touching Winnifred Dee, as served up to them with its items and details.

"Mrs. Sims, I fear Winnifred Dee is dying," began Mr. Probert, after shaking hands with her, and congratulating her on her return and renewed health. "I knew nothing about her illness until half an hour ago, I am sorry to say, when Martha White darted out and called me in. I don't think she will live."

Considering what she had heard, this address took Mrs. Sims by surprise. She had not supposed the whispered scandal admitted of doubt, but she had always deemed the surgeon to be of an open, straightforward nature, and he certainly did not speak now as though he had anything dark on his conscience that needed concealment.

"What is the matter with her?" she asked, watching his countenance attentively.

"Consumption. It has come on very rapidly, and, by what she tells me, must be hereditary. But the reason I speak to you is this, Mrs. Sims: the poor girl—and really she is but a girl—has some trouble upon her mind. It struck me so from her sad tones and the hopeless despair in her eyes; so I asked her—asked her to tell me what is was, but she would not. I think, perhaps, if you were to question her, she might tell you."

"You have no idea what it is, yourself?"

"I have not the least. A new bonnet shop has set itself up in Staveley's old place since you left, which no doubt diminishes her custom—the world is sure to run after fresh faces, you know—but I

do not think it can be that. Perhaps you will see her? It is a sad thing for her to be dying there all alone."

Mrs. Sims looked after the Doctor as he passed onwards up the street. "There's not an atom of embarrassment about him," she said to herself; "he *could* not speak to me in this free, open way if what the Miss Downs say is true. I don't believe it; some strange mistake must exist, and I'll go and talk to Winnifred Dee. I always liked her."

Mrs. Sims found Winnifred very ill indeed; shivering with the cold, agitated by the Doctor's visit. Partly at the kind greeting, partly at the pleasure of seeing the Vicar's wife again—for she had always befriended her—she burst into tears and sobs.

It was not a moment for cross-questioning, especially on unpleasant topics, and Mrs. Sims left her, promising to go again the next day. She then paid a visit to Miss Jemima Raddle and to the Miss Downs, and was assured by those gentlewomen that any mistake in what they had known and seen and heard was simply impossible.

The morning saw Mrs. Sims by Winnifred's bedside: even in those few hours she seemed weaker. It was a somewhat difficult task that Mrs. Sims had to enter upon. She began by talking lovingly to the girl in soothing tones, so as to invite her confidence, and she then asked her to tell her what was upon her mind. Winnifred answered by relating how she had been shunned; she did not know why or wherefore; answered with the tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Are you not conscious of having given cause of offence?" asked Mrs. Sims.

"I have not given any that I know of, ma'am," sighed Winnifred. "I lie awake, night after night, asking myself what it can be that I've done, and I can think of nothing. It is not, you see, as though one lady shunned me; it's every one of them."

Mrs. Sims considered. How best could she put the questions she wished to put. "Do you recollect, Winnifred," she began at last, "that, when Miss Jane Down came to you to pay her bill last autumn, you changed a ten-pound note for her, giving her back a five-pound note and some gold?"

"Yes, I remember it well," said Winnifred; "it is not often I have had to change a note of that value. Miss Jane was going to pay me in coin, and found that she had not brought out enough."

"Can you remember whence you had that five-pound note?"

"There was nothing wrong with it, was there?" quickly cried the sick girl—for thought is quick. "It was not a bad one, was it?"

"No, no, child; the note was good. But I rather wish to trace back that note, for another reason. Where did you get it?"

"From Mr. Probert," replied Winnifred, readily. "He gave it me in payment for some books."

"Books!" repeated Mrs. Sims, looking at her in some doubt. "Five pounds for books?"

"It was in this way," said the girl. "One day, when he came in to change a book, I was writing to London to order a parcel of books down. He suddenly said that perhaps my agent in London would be good enough to procure him a new medical work that had recently been published: it would save the trouble of having it sent direct to himself. Yes, I said, and it would perhaps save him also a few shillings by way of discount. The book came in my parcel; it was a very expensive one in two volumes, nearly three guineas, I think. Mr. Probert gave me that five-pound note in payment, and I returned him the change."

"Those wicked scandal-mongers!" mentally groaned Mrs. Sims. "Mr. Probert used to come in to change books?" she said aloud.

"Yes, ma'am, often; nearly every other day. He should be lost, he said, without a good book of fiction to relax his mind with at the close of day. There is nothing like it, he thinks, for relieving a tired brain. Lately he has not had time to read."

"I'll not question her about the other, which that Jemima Raddle tells of—I should be ashamed to," decided Mrs. Sims. And she dropped the subject for one of pleasantness, speaking words of peace and consolation.

When she carried her report home to her husband, and told him her conviction—that Winnifred Dee was pure and innocent as the day—Mr. Sims put on his top-coat and hat, and went out to make a call upon the Doctor.

"Have I been in the habit of visiting Winnifred Dee late in the evening?—Why, what on earth do you mean, Sims?" demanded the surgeon, in reply to a question or two which had astonished him.

"Did you *never* go to her house late at night—for any purpose—ten or eleven or twelve o'clock; I don't know exactly what time. To change books, say—or on some other errand?"

"Never."

"It is said you did."

"But I tell you I did not. Who says it?"

"Miss Jemima Raddle affirms she saw you. I had better repeat to you all that is being said," continued the clergyman; "indeed, I have no alternative now but to sift the matter to the bottom." And, drawing his chair nearer, he forthwith told the whole.

Mr. Probert responded by a few strong words, calling the ladies anything but angels, especially Miss Jemima. In the midst of this tirade, against which the clergyman mildly put up his hand in protest, he suddenly stopped short.

"Stay a bit," said he, after a pause; "I see it now. Says, does she, the old jade, that she saw me come stealing down the street—stealing, forsooth!—and look up at Winnifred Dee's bedroom window, and then knock at the door, and go in when I was admitted? Well, it's true."

"True!"

"It occurred in this way. Mary Thorpe was to be married the next day. She and her mother had had their bonnets at Miss Dee's. I was over at the farmer's that afternoon, attending the little lad who was ill, and heard a lament from the farmer's wife that she should not be able to wear her bonnet: it was too small, would not come on, and she had no one, they were so busy, to send in with it to Miss Dee's to get it altered. I offered to bring it in for her, and to take it back in the morning—I was going to the wedding, you know. So she had the band-box, it was but a small one, put in my gig, with the bonnet and a note in it, and I brought it in to Miss Dee, undertaking to send for it again in the evening. Before evening came, I was called out to a patient, from whom I did not get away till close on eleven o'clock. I was nearly at home when I remembered Mrs. Thorpe's bonnet. It was too late to send a servant for it, and on the spur of the moment I turned back for it myself, knowing I should be off betimes in the morning. Deuce take that Miss Jemima, with her miserable notions!" emphatically spoke the Doctor, breaking off to say it.

"Never mind Miss Jemima; go on."

"There's not much more. I looked up at the window: had it been dark I should have concluded they were gone to bed, and taken the chance of the morning; but there was a light in it, so I rang. The little servant, Milly, opened the door ——"

"I thought Milly did not sleep there," interrupted Mr. Sims.

"She did, I believe, while Martha White was absent. Any way, she was there that night. Miss Dee followed her downstairs and gave me the band-box, which was all ready for me, and I carried it home. I was not there two minutes. And that's the whole truth, Sims, on my sacred word."

The clergyman went out with a downcast face, musing on the iniquity of the human heart in woman; its proneness to believe evil instead of good, its propensity to traduce rather than to excuse. He called upon Miss Eliza and Miss Jane Down, and gave them, in his mild way, a little of his mind; and from them he went to Miss Jemima Raddle.

"I'd put the backbiting old maids in the pillory, give me my way," pronounced Captain Curlew the next day, when Rillbrook was being convicted of its slander. "Hang me if I'd not!"

But it was too late to save Winnifred Dee. A very short while, and the angels came down, to bear her in their arms from this cruel world to one where slander and sorrow entereth not.

"She was delicately and nervously constituted, and she inherited consumption from both father and mother," observed Mr. Probert to a knot of questioning ladies. "And the worry that fell upon her from the whispering of false tongues, the sleepless nights, the hours of weeping, must have prepared her for bodily illness, so that when it seized upon her frame she could not make head against it.—— I'd not stop at Rillbrook for the world."

"You are not going to leave it, Doctor?" exclaimed Miss Jane Down, breathlessly, who made one of the listeners.

"Indeed I am, ma'am. I was already thinking of joining a friend in London, whose practice is too large for him, and this has decided me. Who knows what might be said of me next, were I to stay? How could I suffer my little daughter to grow up in the place?"

"Oh, but—it was all a mistake, you know, dear Mr. Probert," cried Miss Jemima Raddle. "What should we do without *you?*"

"What you can, ma'am," answered the Doctor. "I have sold my practice here to James Worthington, of Ripley. He has a wife and six children, and I hope you'll treat him better than you have treated me."

"Oh, dear! We never treated you ill, I'm sure. We quite—quite—condoned it in you."

"No doubt! But you killed Winnifred Dee."

KINGSWEAR: A FAREWELL.

FAREWELL to Kingswear and its wooded bays,
Where the fair Dart is hurrying to the sea;
Its flower-enamell'd rocks and fern-clad ways,
Its heathery steeps, pine-scented greenery.
Its dusky hills, beneath the evening red,
Its shining sails that glide beneath the trees,
Its snowy sea-birds wheeling overhead,
And gush of moonlight over darkened seas.
Some greater bard than I may fitly praise,
I can but catalogue its beauties rare,
Though often much obscured by fog and haze,
And drenching rains, and heavy wintry air.

The sea-pinks rosying in ocean cave,
The river widening to infinitude,
The dove-like wings that rock upon the wave,
Or on opposing seas of ether brood—
No more with wistful eyes I stand to mark
Where sea and sun the heavens with glory pave,
And memory charters many a fairy bark,
While quickened fancy soars beyond the grave.

* * * * *

Sister, when next we meet where will it be?
Beside the widening river or the sea—
In wrinkled age, or youth's eternity?

C. M. GEMMER.

SAN MARCELLO:

THE PISTOJAN DISTRICT OF THE APENNINES.

HOW to make the most of a short time or a small sum of money are considerations which enter into many minds. Cook's and Gaze's circulars are consulted, other suggestions for travelling moderately are discussed, yet in spite of the facilities offered in various ways, most people are glad to listen to a few practical remarks from anyone who may have stayed at a particular spot in France, Italy, Germany, or elsewhere; to hear of the kind of accommodation afforded, the scenery and excursions to be made in the neighbourhood, the expense of going hither and thither, the mode in which the place is reached, and other similar matters.

Switzerland is pretty well known, is yearly more and more frequented, and perhaps no country presents such infinite variety of beauty. The snow-capped mountains, the blue glaciers, the lovely fertile valleys, the streams, lakes, and waterfalls, the delicate Alpine flowers, all give a series of beautiful pictures with which it is scarcely possible to meet in such quick succession in any other country.

At this season of the year many persons visit the Italian lakes, but they would fear to pass a summer further south lest they should be fairly scorched. This is because they imagine themselves walking through heated cities, having on either side of them glaring white buildings and the blazing sun pouring down upon their heads. They cannot conceive it possible that cool and refreshing retreats are to be found, such as are to be met with in the Apennines, or places where people with civilized habits could take up their abode. This is a mistake.

Many of the charming villages in the Apennines are already much visited, and some pleasant volumes have been written describing tours in a portion of the Pistojan districts, where now, at many points, decent, if somewhat simple, accommodation may be had. Two summers ago I passed three months in an old rambling villa at San Marcello, and spent them agreeably and coolly. Finding Florence intolerably hot towards the end of June, and that the lady at whose pension I had been living was going to take a country house for her family and friends, I asked permission to join the party. She readily agreed to my wish, and we soon left the suffocating city.

We started from Florence on the 25th of June, a little before seven in the morning, for Pracchia, a railway journey of between forty and fifty miles, which carried us through Pistoja and some beautiful country, until at half-past ten o'clock we reached Pracchia. Here a carriage was awaiting us to drive us still eight miles farther before we should arrive at San Marcello. Some travellers prefer driving from

Pistoja, but this only makes the journey longer, more fatiguing, and expensive. For twelve francs a carriage with two horses may be hired at Pracchia for the drive to San Marcello. There is also a public conveyance which goes to and fro twice a day, but it is dirty and close, and your companions are not always of the cleanest or pleasantest description.

The eight miles drive to San Marcello, in the midst of grand scenery, is truly delightful. The mountains are neither snow-capped nor barren, but covered with splendid Spanish, horse-chestnut and acacia trees, suggesting freshness and shade. The road ascends gradually the whole way to San Marcello, so that it was impossible to

San Marcello.

drive very fast, and not until half-past twelve did we reach our destination.

The man-servant had preceded us, and our noonday meal was already spread in a cool room, the windows of which were darkened by thick sun-blinds; the floor was of brick, and everything was calculated to overcome heat. This room opened into a more furnished salon partially covered with carpet; there were sofas and easy chairs in abundance, plenty of books from a well-established library (Vieusseux's) in Florence, a good piano which we hired from Pistoja, all serving to make this an agreeable lounge after meals.

The front bed-rooms, with brick floors and of fair size, looked out on a small piazza, always lively on account of the cafés which lined it. Even in the country, an Italian would not be happy if he did not pass an hour or two in these lounges in the evening, smoking and

sipping his light wine or sirop, listening to the gossip of the neighbourhood. Even ladies quit their homes, and, throwing a black lace veil over their heads, go there to chat with and see each other, though they may not take anything.

The sleeping apartments at the back of the villa looked out on the glorious Apennines. I had the good fortune to occupy one of these, and many a moonlight night, before going to rest, I gazed on the calm, wondrous scene from my window. Here and there a little village, surmounted by its picturesque church, seemed in deep repose as it nestled in or was perched aloft in the mountains. The habit of rising early in this climate, at five if possible, gives you all this beauty in its dewy, delicious freshness.

We gave up our town hours and breakfasted early, dining at one, and taking high tea at seven, sometimes at home, at others abroad. The Italians of the household of course indulged in an afternoon siesta, but I, who could not manage this, took my book to a cool brick-floored room into which my bedroom opened, or else walked across the way to the small hospital to visit the unfortunate inmates, in whom I had become interested. At first they imagined my object to be curiosity, but when they saw that I was anxious to sympathise and help them, they looked eagerly for me, and were sadly disappointed if anything prevented my going to them. The hospital is poorly endowed; though it is beautifully clean and airy, the food supplied to the patients is of the most miserable description. A little minestra (a thin, washy soup), and the meat from which it is made, is all the nourishment given them, and with the often capricious appetite of an invalid, they are thankful to get any change in their diet. Ices are generally prescribed by the doctor. A young lady whom I induced to accompany me, frequently joined in sending them a good supply. They were also very grateful for any linen given them.

We had fine, steady weather, the whole time we remained in the mountains. Frequently in the evening we were in the habit of chartering two or three donkeys. One carried the materials for our evening meal (the man-servant, sometimes the man-cook, accompanying us), while we took it in turns to mount the others, so that by walking and riding alternately we were able to accomplish a considerable distance and to become acquainted with the beautiful spots of the neighbourhood. The large spreading chestnuts furnished a famous shelter for us while we eat our supper, and on moonlight nights we did not return home till ten or eleven, and never experienced any bad effects from damp or dew. The children used to accompany us, for, like all Italian children, they slept for two or three hours in the day, and were kept up late for the sake of coolness.

In the neighbourhood of San Marcello numerous excursions can be made. Some lie close at hand, and others at some distance

Mammiano, which can be seen from San Marcello, is about two miles distant, and we frequently strolled there in the cool of the evening without hats or mantles, just as we rose from the tea-table. Then, after a little rest on an old wall, we wended our way back, while some of the gentlemen of the party touched the guitar, and gave us charming Florentine or Neapolitan melodies. In this beautiful climate so much enjoyment is to be had from the mere pleasure of existence.

A donkey or mule, if a little climbing or scrambling is not objected to, will take the tourist to the Grotta di Macereti, so picturesquely described by Massimo D'Azeglio in his "Nicolo de' Lapi," in which he makes Lisa, the daughter of Nicolo, die after her betrayal by Troilo. The rugged path by which this interesting grotto is reached is arched over the whole way by trees, so that the ride may be taken in the hottest weather. A pleasant morning may be spent in visiting the paper manufactory on the Lima, a beautiful walk of two miles from Mammiano. Another village, Cutigliano, charmingly perched up in the mountains, may easily be reached by a good walker; those who prefer driving may secure a carriage for five francs from San Marcello. There are some very creditable pensions at Cutigliano, and some people I met told me they were fairly housed. But the lady with whom I stayed in the rambling villa has now a most comfortable pension two miles out of San Marcello, where the visitor may be boarded for seven or eight francs a day, according to his requirements. There are bath and billiard rooms, and everything calculated to make the time pass agreeably. At the back of the house are woods, which always furnish grateful shade to those who prefer living out of doors. The lady herself, the proprietress, is most intelligent and obliging, anxious that everybody should be amused, and ever seeking to make pleasant pic-nic and other parties. I found this the case when I was with her at 4, Via del Corso, Florence, and when at the villa at San Marcello.

One morning we all rose early, and drove to Boscolungo, or Abetone, as it is indifferently called by the inhabitants. It is situated in the Apennines, at a considerable height above San Marcello, and there is a great difference of temperature between the two places. We wound round and round through wood and mountain scenery, coming here and there upon a cool spring or fountain, near which, perhaps, a peasant reclined, picturesque looking, though dirty. Of drinking hastily from these fountains beware—they are often swarming with leeches! On arriving, we found the air crisp, like an October day in England; two or three hours at mid-day were sultry, but in the evening it became sufficiently cold to make us glad to descend on our way home.

Gavinana, another village to visit, is a long walk, or donkey drive. It is worth seeing; not simply from its quaintness, but on account of the interest attached to it from the struggle which took place here in

1530, when Ferruccio fell, betrayed by the treachery of Malatesta, while he was fighting for Florence against the Imperialists, to keep it out of the hands of the Medici. This desperate struggle is admirably described by D'Azeglio in his "Nicolo de' Lapi," and there is a tablet on one of the old houses in the piazza recording how the hero fell.

While I was staying at San Marcello two ladies made themselves conspicuous at Gavinana by preaching Protestantism in the piazza, and in distributing tracts. This well-meant but ill-judged proceeding created much disturbance, and the priests warned their flock that if they persisted in listening to the teaching of these ladies, and in receiving their tracts, they would excommunicate them. The ladies saw their error, and the matter soon ended.

I must not forget to suggest an excursion to the lake Scaffaiolo. For this the tourist must choose that part of the month when the moon is nearly full. He must also be prepared to climb, and to lose his night's rest. In case of bad weather, a hut has been erected close to the lake; it is perfectly air-tight, and adjoins a shed, in which wood and coal are kept. The dawn, as is well known, is extremely chilly in Italy; but should the day turn out fine and clear, a magnificent panorama of the plains of Lombardy stretches out before the eyes of the tourist. The lake of Scaffaiolo is two hundred metres long and sixty wide. San Marcello can be reached from it by Spignana, near the grotto of Macereti.

I have only mentioned a very few of the principal excursions in the neighbourhood; but for those who are good walkers, and who do not object to a little climbing and fatigue, there are still many more which it would be delightful to make. Donkeys, also, are easily procured at San Marcello and the surrounding villages, and they are stronger and more sure-footed than those we meet with in England. Carriages are tolerably well supplied, and not very expensive; the fare, for example, to Bagni di Lucca, a drive of some hours from San Marcello, is only fifteen francs. From thence it is not difficult to get to Via Reggia, where the sea breeze tempers the heat, and which is gay from being a favourite resort of the Italians as well as of foreigners.

It is, in short, perfectly unnecessary to quit Italy during June, July, and August; there are quite as many fresh and cool retreats here as elsewhere, were they known. Being less frequented, they are fare more restful, and far less expensive. Those who go to Italy for the winter would do well to try it in the summer. Those who propose to make a short stay or tour abroad, would be extremely pleased with a visit to the Pistojan mountains, a journey which, on reaching Florence, is very easily accomplished, and the recollection of which will leave the traveller satisfied that he has seen something out of the beaten track, much that is fresh and beautiful, and seen at very little expense.

A. B.

WILFUL MARGARET.

I.

A LONG, low room with oaken panels, dark with age, and quaint, old-fashioned furniture speaking of a by-gone generation. A tall, noble looking girl with glossy, dark brown hair, drawn back from the beautifully chiselled face and fastened at the back in a massy coil by a small gold comb, is standing before a tall and narrow ebon-framed mirror. A maid is engaged in fastening the long sweeping black dress that fits so closely to her exquisite figure as she stands in a thoughtful attitude.

"You are never going to ride Wild Sorrel to-morrow, Miss Margaret?" exclaimed the girl as she finished her task.

"Who told you that I was?" answered her mistress in a careless, indifferent tone, as she arranged a moss rose-bud in the front of her dress.

"Buckle, ma'am. The grooms say that she isn't safe for a lady to ride. They would like to tell the Squire, but dare not, for fear of your anger."

Miss Darrell laughed. "They are afraid for me, are they! What does Uncle John call me, Marian?"

"'Wilful Madge,' Miss Margaret," answered the girl timorously.

"And you know that he calls me 'Wilful Madge' because I am too self-willed to allow anyone to thwart me? So, you see, Marian," she continued as she fastened two small pearls in her ears, "that whether the grooms tell the Squire or not, it will make no difference to me. I have said that I would conquer Wild Sorrel, and conquer her I will. As to Buckle, it cannot be any business of his."

Marian was too much accustomed to her young mistress's imperious ways to be surprised at her tone. Margaret Darrell, the orphan niece of jovial John Darrell, the bachelor owner of Waverley Hall, had long reigned despotically over all with whom she came in contact. Her uncle was too good-tempered and indolent to attempt to control her, and her naturally self-willed disposition had been unduly fostered by the years of indulgence in every whim and caprice that she chose to set up.

With a musical ripple of song, she opened the door and descended the broad flight of stairs that led to the hall, the sides of which, with their quaintly carved panels, were covered with dim and faded portraits of Margaret's martial ancestors and their numerous trophies of the chase and battle-field. With a soft, gliding movement she crossed the curiously tiled floor and reached a small door that opened into a large conservatory. A large magnolia, with its luscious, overpowering scent, faced her. Beneath its shade a tall and slim, but

well-formed, lithe man, in a black velvet lounging coat, was standing moodily, rolling a cigarette between his long taper fingers. George Wilson was, as all his friends admitted, wonderfully handsome. Soft waves of glorious golden-tinted hair rippled over his shapely head, his rich full lips were heavily fringed with a silky moustache of the same hue, while the large luminous eyes that slumbered beneath the voluptuous fulness of the lids were intensely black. He and Colonel Massingham—his fellow guest at the Hall—were rival suitors for the hand of Margaret Darrell. Each was a worthy match, as regarded wealth and position, for the Squire's heiress, but George Wilson lacked the steady nobility of character possessed by his older and more staid rival. Fickleness and evanescence were the characteristics which marred his nature. It was impossible to say which Madge favoured the more; but George was the more confident of the two. She used greater freedom and less restraint with him than she did with the Colonel; but then she had known the one from girlhood and the other but for a few weeks.

"So you have come at last," muttered Mr. George crossly as Margaret made her appearance.

"Yes," she answered demurely; adding, with provoking meekness, "you told me to come, and I came." Casting down her eyes, a roguish smile flitted round the corners of her dimpled mouth as she toyed gently with a rose-bud that was nestling on her breast.

"Who gave you that?" he demanded fiercely, his eyes following her action.

"Colonel Massingham ——"

"And you accepted it, after having refused the one I offered you this morning?" The eyes were flashing very angrily now.

"Don't be nonsensical, George. You interrupted me before I had finished. It is a new kind grown by Colonel Massingham's gardener, and my uncle wants to get some for the rosery: there's a large bunch of them on the drawing-room table." But she did not say who had singled out that bud for her.

George Wilson appeared but half mollified by this explanation. Her cool indifference seemed to exasperate him.

"Madge," he cried passionately, "you have no more feeling than a block of marble, and you trifle with me as though I were cold as yourself. Oh, Margaret, tell me whether you love me! You shall not go until you have answered me."

In his passion he grasped her tightly by the arm. Miss Darrell was half startled, but only for a moment. Her fearless spirit rather admired this violent wooing.

"How absurd you are, George!" she cried with a low laugh as she withdrew from his grasp. "If you are going to be so rough, I will not stay with you. What do you mean?"

"Then give me an answer," he growled surlily, in his jealous anger: and a mischievous twinkle came into the bright, flashing eyes as she

slowly edged her way from him. To torment the world came natural to Miss Darrell.

"If foolish moths will flutter near the candle they must expect to get their wings singed," cried she: and with a rippling laugh, she opened the outer door, slipped through, and dexterously turned the key in the lock to prevent his following her.

Leaving George Wilson to digest this at his leisure, she sought the library and, throwing herself in a low fauteuil, tried to lose herself in the pages of the *Saturday Review*, but not successfully: and she soon threw it from her in discontent and an access of irritation.

"Why, Madge! what's up?" exclaimed a cheery, good-tempered voice, as a stout, jovial-looking old gentleman entered the room. "Has the 'Saturday Reviler,' as John Bright dubbed it, been cutting up your pet novel—eh?" And the Squire dropped into a chair opposite Madge and regaled himself with a copious pinch of snuff.

"George has been rather out of sorts, lately, has he not?" continued he, as she sat without speaking.

"Has he?" was the careless reply given now, as she caressed the head of a large mastiff that was nestling lovingly against her knees. "Perhaps he has lost heavily on the St. Leger? George's luck and his knowledge of horses are about equal."

The Squire looked at her curiously. "Well, Madge," he said at last, "George's income is a large one; it can stand a few expensive mistakes on the turf: with your sharp head at his right hand we may some day see him the owner of the winner of the Derby. Come, child, which of your two lovers is it to be? George, or Wilfrid?"

"I don't know that it need be either, uncle. Why do you ask?"

"Well, my dear," began the Squire, as he rubbed nervously at his gold-rimmed eye-glasses, for his easy, laissez-faire nature was rather apt to quail before the energetic self-will of his imperious niece, and her supreme indifference to her own good, "the fact is, Massingham has been with me this morning. You've made a conquest of a noble fellow, Madge. You have only to say the word to be mistress of Massingham Hall—the finest place in the county ——"

"Stop, Uncle John." A look of displeasure was creeping over Margaret's expressive face as she interrupted. "May I ask what Colonel Massingham means?"

"Means?"

"Yes. How justify his conduct in asking you for my hand before he knows that I am willing to bestow it?"

"Why—I'm sure I don't know," faltered her uncle. "Massingham has somehow got it into his head that he is not quite indifferent to you, I fancy. And I don't see, Madge," he continued, plucking up a little more spirit, "that he is to be blamed for seeking my consent before speaking to you."

"No, uncle dear," cried Madge, as, with an affectionate demonstrativeness not frequent with her, she stroked his rough hand lovingly, "it

is not that; but he has no right to assume that he has but to ask and have." Her eyes were flashing ominously, which augured ill for Colonel Massingham's suit, as her uncle pressed her for an answer; her cheeks flushed angrily as she rose, evidently she was greatly put out.

"Well, Madge?"

"Tell Colonel Massingham," she cried with the dignity of an offended queen, "that Margaret Darrell is not to be wooed through another, and that it is unwise to take things too much for granted."

The Squire maintained a prudent silence, but raised his eyebrows comically at the tragic air she assumed as she strode majestically towards the door. Before she could reach it, however, it was opened by some one from without, and a tall, strongly built, soldierly looking man, of about thirty-eight years of age, entered the room. Without being possessed of the exceptional beauty of his more youthful rival, Wilfrid Massingham could fairly claim to rank as a handsome man. All who looked on his pure-bred English face felt that they saw before them one who was, in every sense of the word, a gentleman. The well-defined chin and firm-looking mouth, its sternness softened by the most fascinating of smiles, bespoke a manly strength and decision of character that was not belied by the noble brow or by earnest eyes of a soft tender grey.

Margaret's cheeks paled as she met his gaze. She made a movement to pass him; but he put out his hand to detain her. Squire Darrell, failing to make the Colonel comprehend his winks and nods, discreetly withdrew, leaving him to bear alone the full brunt of the young lady's displeasure.

"Will you allow me to pass, Colonel Massingham?" she asked, impatiently tapping the ground with her foot.

"Certainly, if you wish it," he replied, moving from before the door. But her mood had changed: she made no movement to avail herself of the accorded permission, and the look of scorn partly faded from her face. It is hard to fathom the depths of the female mind, especially where it is swayed by love. Perhaps her undisciplined spirit was prompting her to revenge her offended dignity by the humiliation of him who had caused it. Or, another cause may have had its effect on her conduct. Colonel Massingham's manliness had hitherto prevented him from becoming blindly submissive to her wayward whims and caprices. She had long resented this, and her resentment was increased by a half-acknowledged intuition that in a tussle for mastery between them the Colonel would come off victor. Now the ball was at her feet, and she would show how well she could roll it, how little she cared for it.

"Miss Darrell," Colonel Massingham began, in quiet manly tones, as they stood facing each other, "I am not a courtier, and I fear have but little romance to spend in sentimental speeches. Your uncle, probably, has told you of my hopes. Have I been presumptuous in entertaining them?"

This was a very different mode of wooing from that pursued by the passionate, vehement George Wilson: Madge was somewhat puzzled by its truthful and earnest straightforwardness.

"I will be candid with you, my dear," continued the Colonel as she stood debating how to answer him. "You are not my first love—the memory of that is too dark to be shown to you—and I am nearly twice your age; but if you can accept the true and honest affection that I now offer you, I pledge you, by my honour, that, from me you shall never have cause to repent it."

He put out his hands as if to take hers in his, but she kept them folded together in front of her. "I should not have spoken to your uncle," he added, "had I not felt that I had received sufficient encouragement from you to justify such a step."

This latter allusion was unfortunate. All Madge's offended dignity bristled up again; the softening effect that had been stealing over her gave place to angry passion. In words of scorn she upbraided him for his presumption in imagining that she favoured his suit, hardly herself knowing what she said.

Colonel Massingham fixed his clear, steady eyes on hers, and she was fain to droop as she foolishly cast from her that most precious gift, a simple, honest love. Without vouchsafing another glance at the unfortunate man whose hopes she had so ruthlessly quenched, Madge swept from the room.

Stunned by the unexpectedness of the blow, for he truly loved her, Wilfrid Massingham sat lost in a dreamy stupor. Twice within his life had he now loved, and twice had his heart been lacerated and torn by the capricious sex. He bowed his head in his hands as the memory of the dark past ran riot through his brain, bringing before him one who had seared his heart's affections—for ever, he had thought then. It was not until he saw Margaret, he learnt that he still could love. Were the women all alike, he wondered—yet, how he loved her! The dusky shadows of evening began to fill the room, when some one entered and disturbed his reverie. It was George Wilson; George with a look of triumph sparkling in his wondrous eyes.

"Congratulate me, old fellow," he cried in joyous, rapturous tones as he held out his hand to Wilfrid; "I have won her."

A look of pain passed over Colonel Massingham's calm features as he took the hand that was offered to him. "I do congratulate you, Wilson," he said in tones of deep and sincere earnestness. "The fight has been a fair one, and you are the conqueror. Margaret is wilful and high spirited; but she has noble qualities, and she will be what you choose to make her."

"What I choose to make her!—do you think that?"

"Yes, if she loves you. I can but hope she does—as you have won her."

George Wilson's shallow nature was moved by his companion's

earnestness. "Poor fellow," he cried to himself when left alone. "He feels it pretty keenly. He's not half a bad sort. It's a pity Madge hadn't the sense to accept him. He's just the cool sort of fellow she ought to have for a husband. Egad! I'm not sure that I haven't made an ass of myself. She'll be the deuce of a trouble to manage."

So! Those were Mr. George's sentiments. While Madge had kept him at arm's length he had felt all the exciting zest of pursuit; now that she had come and, of her own free will, consented to be his, the pleasure began to pall and he longed for a new face to stimulate him to fresh exertion.

And Madge—where is she? In her bedroom, with no light save the dim grey of the approaching night. Her face is pale, and there are signs of scalding tears on her cheeks as she rises slowly from a pitiful attitude. A faded rose-bud, wet from the touch of her warm young lips, is in her hands. How little does Wilfrid Massingham deem that his offering is so carefully treasured! Opening her desk, Madge presses her lips again passionately to the withered bud and then places it beside that one other most dearly loved and prized of all her possessions—a lock of her mother's hair—that dear mother whose memory is to her as a misty, half-forgotten dream. How often does she yearn for that one tender, sympathetic breast on which to pour out her joys and griefs: with a mother to guide and train her how different she would have been! The little secret drawer is closed with a snap, and the two mementoes slumber side by side in a darkness as deep as that now closing around Madge's wayward, untamed heart.

II.

The next morning Madge came down, prepared to ride Wild Sorrel. Buckle, waiting at breakfast, looked askance at his young lady's habit.

"She be main masterful this morning, miss," said Thomas, the old head groom. "I had a sight of trouble to saddle her." Wild Sorrel shook her glossy mane scornfully, as if she understood the complaint but felt utterly indifferent to it.

"Hold her head, Thomas," cried Madge, disdaining his warning as she prepared to mount. George Wilson was beside her. He stepped forward to assist her, but she motioned him back. "I do not need any help, thank you," she exclaimed curtly, as she sprang lightly to her seat. Wild Sorrel turned her eyes on her with a surprised look, as if wondering at her temerity in mounting her. Contrary, however, to Thomas's expectation, she stood quite still and allowed Madge to soothingly pat her neck. Madge was a fearless rider and knew well how to manage a stubborn or restive horse; but the mare's great strength and character for vice may well have aroused the groom's fears for their young mistress's safety.

Colonel Massingham came forward. He and Madge had met at dinner the preceding night—to outward observers just as usual. Perhaps he may have been a trifle more grave; but, if so, his gravity was counterbalanced by her feverish brilliancy; she seemed resolved to outshine herself. He now advanced and tried to prevail upon her to change her steed for one less uncertain; but the quiet words in which he urged his request seemed to add fuel to the fire. "Stand back," she cried. "I am going to start, and Wild Sorrel may do you harm."

The Colonel turned appealingly to George Wilson, who was preparing to mount a beautiful bay that his groom was holding. "Will you permit her to risk her life like this?" he said to him in tones that had an unconscious ring of scorn in them. George shrugged his shoulders with selfish deprecation, as if to intimate how useless it would be for him to oppose his will to hers.

Thomas had opened the gates, and Wild Sorrel was beginning to get restive; but Colonel Massingham, who had caught sight of the Squire's figure advancing in the distance, still maintained his grasp. Whether she feared her uncle would stop her, or that her own self-dissatisfaction goaded her to passion, Margaret, with an angry flush, raised her small gold-handled whip; at the same time Wild Sorrel tossed her head, the Colonel was dragged forward, and the blow that had been aimed at his hand alighted, with full force, on his cheek. A livid weal rose on it as, stung by the sharpness of the pain, he slackened his grip of the reins. In a moment, and before he had time to tighten it, they were wrested from him and he was left standing by himself; Wild Sorrel was curvetting and prancing down the lane, followed, at a respectful distance from her heels, by George Wilson on his well-trained and easily managed bay.

They rode along, Wild Sorrel pretty quiet. She soon dropped into an easy canter, and as Margaret felt the exhilarating effects of the healthy exercise her anger began to subside, and qualms of remorse, that she had allowed her temper to master her in her conflict with Colonel Massingham, to take its place. She would not, however, allow this to become apparent to her companion, but, on the contrary, exerted herself to make the ride agreeable to him.

"Wild Sorrel's character has been maligned," remarked George, as, after about an hour's riding, they turned their horses' heads in the direction of home.

Madge smiled with self-complacency; as if the merit of the mare's improvement in temper was due to her rider's skill. They were now crossing a large breezy common about two miles from the Hall, and Madge, deceived by Wild Sorrel's good behaviour, and relying on her own self-confidence, was not quite so much on the alert as she should have been when riding an uncertain-tempered animal.

As they reached a cross-road a large gipsy caravan met them. Now anything in the shape of a waggon was Wild Sorrel's pet aver-

sion; so, as soon as she caught sight of the large, clumsy-looking vehicle piled up with its motley collection of articles, she planted her fore-feet firmly in the ground, and raised her head with a snort of displeasure. At the same time an ugly-looking cur ran out from beneath the gaudily coloured van and snapped at her legs. Like a flash of lightning the vicious animal lowered her head, threw back her ears, seized the bit between her teeth, and darted off with the speed of the whirlwind. Mr. Wilson started in pursuit, but his horse was no match in speed for Wild Sorrel, and there was soon a long distance between them. Madge, he could see, was sitting well, but it became painfully evident that she was not strong enough to cope with the prodigious strength of the mare now that she was on her mettle. Had the road been straight there would have been less danger; she might even have succeeded in tiring out the creature's violence; but the mare had left the track. She was taking a sidelong course over the common, and George's face grew pale as he saw her heading directly for some gravel-pits, into which she would assuredly hurl herself unless her wild career could be checked in time. Cold drops of terror burst out over his face as he strained every nerve to urge on his horse.

"Too late," he groaned, in an agony of remorse for not having lent his voice to Colonel Massingham's when trying to dissuade her from her purpose. Wild Sorrel was within a few yards of the pit, the opening of which was concealed from view by a slight ascent, fringed at the margin with some stunted furze bushes. He closed his eyes so that he should not see the catastrophe.

In that critical moment a horseman appeared in sight on the right. He was galloping at full speed, as if to head, and thus stop, the runaway. It was Colonel Massingham; who had sought the solitude of the common in preference to the garrulous companionship of his host, and thus had been witness of Wild Sorrel's mad flight and Margaret's danger. Regardless of self he dashed forward, and reached the brink at the same time as Wild Sorrel. The mare, hearing the sound of hoofs, had slightly slackened her tremendous pace as he neared her; he leaned forward, and by a dexterous movement, grasped her reins close to the curb. By Madge's orders, it unfortunately had been fastened too loosely to be of much use with an animal of Wild Sorrel's calibre.

The movement stopped the mare so suddenly that she was almost thrown back on her haunches. In a moment Margaret had slipped from saddle, and then there was a scream of terror. A falling of gravel was heard, and her preserver and his steed disappeared from view as the edge of the pit gave way under the weight and pressure brought to bear upon it by the struggling horses. Wild Sorrel trotted off quietly and began browsing at the turf as if in her own paddock. George, startled by Margaret's scream, hurried to the scene. With scared face of an ashen pallor, she was clambering and slipping

frantically down the rough sides of the chasm, at the bottom of which Wilfrid Massingham was lying with closed eyes, motionless, as if dead, and with his half-stunned horse a few feet from him.

But few signs of life were in the still form when the girl reached it; she shuddered as she saw the blood oozing from a gash dangerously close to the left temple. A strange, calm self-possession stole over her as she watched George, and some labourers who had witnessed the accident, take a hurdle that was lying near, and place him upon it; her own hands helped to strew it with fern and heather so that he might lie softly. They were not far from the Hall. She walked beside the sad procession alone; George rode off at his best speed for a doctor.

"Leave him to me, my dear," exclaimed the motherly old housekeeper, as he was laid on the bed that had been hastily prepared for him on the ground floor; but Margaret heeded her not. With a face as pale as the deathlike one before her, she stood watching the efforts made to woo back the spirit that seemed about to spread its wings. The Squire, helpless in the sick room, had wandered to the lodge gates, anxious for the doctor. The housekeeper and maids were doing all they could for their master's injured guest. Margaret seemed lost in a dream.

"For my sake," she kept murmuring to herself, as the unwonted tears blinded her eyes. She stooped over him to wipe his forehead with her handkerchief; then, carried away by some sudden and uncontrollable impulse, she bent over the prostrate form, and pressed her lips to the cruel livid mark on his cheek that had been caused by her hand. Remorse and repentance made her oblivious of the presence of the women; but other eyes than theirs had seen what she did. George, returning with the doctor, was standing in the doorway.

"Madge," he cried, half angrily, half in astonished wonderment, "how impulsive you are! Massingham is no end of a good fellow —but, hang it all, it's too much to *kiss* him. What does it mean?"

"It means," she cried, in a sharp, anguished voice, as she swept past him, "that I have discovered my mistake. I cannot be your wife, George, for I love Wilfrid Massingham."

For several days Wilfrid Massingham hovered on the borderland that separates life from death, and then the scale turned: nature triumphed.

George Wilson, finding that Madge was in earnest in breaking her engagement with him, had left Waverley. Left it boiling over with rage and love—or what he deemed was that passion: for it had sprung to life again with all its old violence when he found that he had lost that which he thought he had gained. Madge treated him so cavalierly that he was compelled to accept his dismissal: and Wild Sorrel was sent to Tattersall's. Her mistress had vowed never to mount her again. And the time went on.

It was a bright day early in October. The sun was shining with a cheerfulness that was very pleasant; though the weather was sufficiently chilly to make a fire agreeable to those whom age or illness prevented from indulging in open-air exercise. Colonel Massingham—fast progressing in convalescence—was seated before the library fire in a roomy arm-chair, well stuffed with pillows and shawls. A low foot-stool was before his feet, and a book was in his hand. It was lying, however, idly on his knee. He seemed to be lost in meditation. His face was still pale from the effects of his accident, and the wound on his brow was healed; its place being marked by a scar that he would carry to his grave. Perhaps he was recalling the last time that he had sat in that room, when Margaret had so ruthlessly shown to him his folly in trusting to one of her sex. He had seen her once or twice during his illness and been struck by the change in her demeanour—so different to her old imperious ways. He knew that George had left, but could only guess at the cause.

While thus ruminating, the door opened, and, with a soft rustling sound of her long sweeping dress, the object of his thoughts entered the room. "I am so pleased to see you downstairs again," she said as she advanced towards him.

After a few more words of greeting, her tongue seemed to fail her. She began rearranging a bouquet of autumn flowers in the china-bowl that stood on a small ornamental pedestal near, and Colonel Massingham's eyes rested, a tender love beaming in their sad depths, upon the fairest bud of them all. The slight air of embarrassment that dwelt upon her beautiful face made it more womanly than in the old days of her pride and petulance. Margaret had a task before her. She had nerved herself for its fulfilment, but now that the time had come her courage seemed to fail.

"I have never yet thanked you for what you did on that dreadful day," she began in a low, hurried voice, and shivering slightly.

The Colonel tried to stop her words, but the most difficult part of her task was to come; and, now that she had made the plunge, she would not spare herself, humiliating though it might once have been to her proud spirit.

"Will you forgive me, Colonel Massingham," she continued, speaking in a low, ashamed voice, while her cheeks burnt with a vivid red, "for my—for my rudeness, my insolence to you that morning, when you tried to keep me from riding Wild Sorrel?"

"Margaret," he answered in soft, kindly tones, "come here, and let me tell you a dream that I had that day as I was lying at the gates of death. I do not remember being carried to the house. I was as one dead, when, suddenly, I felt the warm touch of lips pressed to my face. I believe that touch saved my life; as I half opened my eyes, I saw that an angel was ministering to me. With that kiss the mark was wiped from my cheek and the remembrance of it from my mind."

The crimson tide surged through Margaret's veins, dyeing her bosom, her cheeks, and her brow with a bright, roseate flush, as she listened to the tender wistfulness in his voice. With a piteous little cry she pressed her hands before her burning face and sank on the soft rug on her knees before him.

He leant forward eagerly. "Margaret," he cried, as he rested his strong hand on her shoulder with a soft, caressing touch, "tell me—what is this? Was my dream reality? Has an angel come to wipe out all the darkness from my past? I think it must be so. Come, rise, my love. Here—at my side; not there, at my feet."

"Yes, here—at your feet, Wilfrid," she burst out passionately. "It is the fittest place for Wilful Madge when she surrenders her will—her faults, her everything—to her lord and master."

With gentle force he drew her to him; her head rested against his shoulder. One hand was held in his as he stooped and pressed his lips to her brow. "No, not at my feet, dearest," he murmured; "but here—on my left—next my heart, with my right arm free to shield and protect thee. Wilful Madge!"

"Not that name with you, Wilfrid," she whispered meekly, as she raised her shy eyes, luminous with their newly-found light. "Never wilful again with you."

"Be it so," came the fond accents. "To me, *Gentle* Madge, my loving wife; to all the rest of the world, as of yore, an' you will, still unconquered, Wilful Madge."

UNRECONCILED.

Old friend, true friend! a thousand leagues apart
Walk we at last, who walked together long:
with my quiet life, and vexed, unquiet heart;
Thou with thy shattered dreams, and sudden sense of wrong.

A thousand leagues—ay, and a thousand more!
No reckoning, no measurement, nor line,
No stretch of countless miles on any sea or shore
Can span the desert breadth between thy life and mine.

It is not that thy home is where the hills
Wear on their shining slopes a flush of spring;
Where the young cresses edge the May-day's leaping rills,
And 'round the valley homes the robins nest and sing;

While mine is where the summer's fiercest beam
Burns hot across the river and the plain;
Where snowy sails all day along the waters gleam;
Where all day sweeps the breeze o'er miles of yellowing grain.

It is not that the blue sea's boundlessness
Hath rolled between, and swept me from mine own:
It was a blacker surge, more wild and pitiless,
That flung me wrecked on this strange tropic shore alone.

For thee to-day the pines' low music moans,
The maples weave their lyrics on the hills;
Faint on my hearing float the thousand blended tones
Of tropic trees and birds, whose song the distance fills.

Day after day thine ever-restless feet
Tread the old paths where mine are hushed for aye;
I make new footprints down one quiet, crumbling street,
At war with all its hush, and with my destiny.

Severed so wide by mount, and wave, and plain,
And by a sea whose waste no chart can show!
Oh, my once darling! we have worn many a chain;
But of *dividing* chains how could Love dream or know?

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THE ARGOSY.

OCTOBER, 1881.

COURT NETHERLEIGH.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LAST WORDS.

DECEMBER was in, and winter weather lay on the earth.

Court Netherleigh looked out on a lovely view, fantastic as the pictures in a scene of fairyland. The snow clung to the branches of the trees like feathery forms of beauty; icicles sparkled in the sun. A new and fair and strange world might have replaced the old one.

Margery Upton lay on the sofa in her dressing-room; an apartment tastily fitted up. She was able to go into it most days, but she had now given up going down stairs. During the months that had gone on since the autumn and the time of Lady Adela's sojourn, the fatal disease, which had fastened on Miss Upton, had made its silent, persistent ravages, and her condition was now no longer a secret; though few people suspected how very near the end might be. Her warm loose dressing-gown of soft violet silk, for she remained loyal to her favourite colour, and her cap of fine lace shading her face, she lay between the fireplace and the window, gazing at the snowy landscape. She did not look very ill, and Grace Chenevix might be excused for the hopeful thought, now crossing her mind, that perhaps Aunt Margery would rally, after all. Grace had come down to spend a few days with her. She sat on the other side the hearthrug, tatting, the small ivory shuttle passing rapidly through her fingers.

"You do not have this beautiful scene in London, Grace," observed Miss Upton.

"Not often, Aunt Margery. Now and then the trees in the park are so ornamented; once, say, in four or five winters. Of course we never see so beautiful a prospect as this is in its entirety."

"I wonder if our scenery in the next world will be much more

beautiful—or if it will even be anything like this?" came the dreamy remark from the invalid. "Ah, Grace, I suppose I shall soon know now."

Lady Grace checked a sigh. She thought it best to be cheerful. The shuttle had to be threaded again, and she got up to reach the ball of thread.

"Who was your letter from this morning, Gracie? Annis said you had one: from 'foreign parts' she took care to inform me."

Grace smiled. "Yes, I had, Aunt Margery; I had forgotten it for the moment. It was from Harriet. They are still in Switzerland, and mean to stay there."

"I thought they were to go to Rome for Christmas."

"But Adela objects to it so much, Harriet says; so they intend to remain where they are, in the desolate old château. They have made it as air-tight as they can, and keep up great wood fires. Adela shrinks from meeting the world, and Rome is unusually full of English."

"How is Adela?"

"Just the same. Worse, if anything; more sad and spiritless. Harriet begins to fear she will become really ill; she seems to have a sort of low fever upon her."

"Poor girl!" sighed Margery Upton. "How she has blighted her life! I had a letter, too, this morning," she resumed, "from Mrs. Lynn. She is very ill; thinks she cannot last much longer—Francis told me so when he was here last week. I wonder"—in a half whisper—"which of us will go first, she or I? I wonder whether either of us will last out to see Christmas?"

"Was Mr. Grubb here last week, Aunt Margery?"

"For a few hours. I like him to come to me sometimes; he is a great favourite of mine. Grace, do you know what I have often wished—that that old story, that he proposed for you, had been fact instead of misapprehension. With you he would have found the happiness he missed with Adela."

A flush passed over Grace's fair, placid face. She bent her head: there appeared to be a knot in the tatting.

"Marriages are said, you know, to be made in heaven," she remarked, looking up with a smile; "so I conclude that all must have been right. Were the years to come over again, Adela would act very differently. She—oh, Aunt Margery, the beautiful feathery sprays are disappearing!"

"Ay; the sun has come out, and melts the snow. Few pleasant things last long in this world, child; something or other comes to mar them. But I thought you meant to go to Moat Grange this morning, Grace. You should start at once; it has struck eleven."

"I said I should like to see Selina, and to call on Mrs. Cleveland on the way."

"Well, do so. Selina will receive you with open arms. She must be amazingly lonely, shut up in that dreary house from year's end to year's end. They see no company."

Grace put her tatting into its little basket, and rose. "But are you sure you shall not feel dull at being left, Aunt Margery?" she stayed to ask.

"I never feel dull, Grace."

Barely had Grace started on her walk when the maid came to the dressing-room to say the Rector had called. "Will you see him, Miss Margery?" she inquired.

"Yes, Annis, I wish to see him," was Miss Upton's reply; as she rose from her recumbent position on the sofa and sat down upon it. Ann folded a gray chenille shawl over her mistress's knees, put a footstool under her feet, and sent Mr. Cleveland up.

After a short while given to subjects of more vital importance, Miss Upton began to talk of her worldly affairs, induced to it possibly by a question of the Rector's, as to whether all things were settled.

"You mean my will, I suppose," she answered, slightly smiling. "Yes, it is settled and done with. Will you be surprised to hear that I made my will within a month of coming into this estate, and that it has never been altered?"

"Indeed!" he remarked.

"I added a codicil to it last year, specifying the legacies I wish to bequeath; but the substance of the will, with its bequest, Court Netherleigh, remains unchanged."

Mr. Cleveland opened his lips to speak, and closed them again. In the impulse of the moment he was about to say "To whom have you left it?" But he remembered that it was a question he could not properly put.

"You were about to ask me who it is that will inherit this property, and you do not like to do so," she said, nodding to him pleasantly. "Well, it ——"

"I beg your pardon for it," he interrupted. "The thought did arise to me, and I nearly forgot myself."

"And very natural that it should arise to you. I am about to tell you all about it. I meant to do so before my death: as well now as any other time."

"Is it Lord Acorn?"

"No, that it is not," she replied, in a quick decisive tone, as if the very suggestion did not please her. "Lord Acorn and his wife have chosen to entertain the notion; though they have not had any warranty for it from me, but the contrary: understand me, please, *the contrary*. Court Netherleigh is willed to Francis Grubb."

Mr. Cleveland's surprise was so great that for the moment he could only gaze at the speaker. He doubted if he heard correctly.

"To Francis Grubb!" he exclaimed.

"Yes; to him, and no other. I see how surprised you are. The world will feel surprise also."

"But Mr. Grubb is so rich!—he does not want Court Netherleigh," debated the Rector: not that he had any wish to cavil with the decree; he simply spoke out the thought that occurred to him.

"Were Mr. Grubb in possession of all the wealth of the Indies, he would still inherit Court Netherleigh," said she, looking across at her listener.

"I see. He is a favourite of yours; and most deservedly so."

"Cast your thoughts outwards, Mr. Cleveland, to the circle known to you and to me," she continued: "can you point out one single individual of it who has any abstract right to succeed to Court Netherleigh?"

"No, I cannot," he said, after a pause. "It is only because I have been accustomed to think it would become Lord Acorn's that—that I feel surprise."

"Lord Acorn would only make ducks and drakes of it; we all know that. And, to return to the subject of right, or claim, he does not possess so much of that as does Mr. Grubb."

Mr. Cleveland waited. He could not quite understand.

"Listen," said Miss Upton. "We three girls—you know whom I mean—were the only relatives Sir Francis Netherleigh had in the world. The other two married; I was left; and, after my mother's death, I came to live here entirely. One day, during his fatal illness—it was the very last day he ever came down stairs—he bade me put aside my work and listen to him. It was a lovely summer's afternoon, and we were sitting in the blue drawing-room, at the open window, he in his easy chair. Uncle Francis—as we three girls had always called him, though, as you know, he was no uncle of ours—began speaking to me for the first time of his approaching death. I burst into tears, and that did not please him: he could be impatient at times. 'I want you to listen to me rationally, Margery, not to cry,' he said; 'and you must have known for some time that I was going.' So I dried my tears as well as I could, and he went on to tell me that it was I who would succeed to Court Netherleigh. I was indeed surprised! I could not believe it; just as you did not believe me now, when I told you I had bequeathed it to Francis Grubb; and I said something about not taking it—that *I* was not of sufficient consequence to be the mistress of Court Netherleigh. That put him out—little things did so at the last—and he testily asked me who else there was to take it. 'I have neither son nor nephew, more's the pity,' he went on, 'no relative of any kind, except you three girls. Had Catherine Grant not married she would have had Court Netherleigh,' he continued, 'but she put herself out of the pale. Betsy Cleveland has done the same; and there's only you.' He then passed on to say how he should wish the place to be kept up; that I

was to do this and that to it. 'And to whom am I to leave it?' I said to him in turn, feeling greatly perplexed; 'I shall not know what to do with it.' 'That is chiefly what I want to talk to you about, he answered. 'Perhaps you will marry, and have a son ——' 'No, Uncle Francis, I shall never marry—never!' I interrupted. For I had had my little romance in early life," broke off Miss Margery, looking at the Rector, "and that kind of thing had closed for me. You have heard something of it, I fancy?"

Mr. Cleveland nodded, and she resumed.

"Uncle Francis saw I was in earnest; that no heir to Court Netherleigh would ever spring from me. 'In that case,' he said, 'I must suggest someone else,' and there he came to a pause. 'There's Lord Acorn,' I ventured to say, 'Betsy's husband; he ——' 'Hold your tongue, Margery, unless you can talk better sense!' he cried out in anger. 'Could I allow Court Netherleigh to fall into the hands of a spendthrift? If George Acorn came into the property to-morrow, by the end of the year there'd be nothing left of it: every acre would be mortgaged away. I charge you,' he solemnly added, 'not to allow George Acorn, or that son of his, little Denne, or any other son he may hereafter have, ever to come into Court Netherleigh. You understand, Margery, I forbid it. Putting aside Acorn's spendthrift nature, which would be an insurmountable barrier, and I daresay his son inherits it, I should not care for a peer to own the property; rather someone who will take the name of Netherleigh, and in whom the baronetcy may perhaps be revived.' You now see," added Miss Upton, glancing at the earnest face of the Rector, "why I am debarred, even though it had been my wish, from bequeathing Court Netherleigh to Lord Acorn."

"I do, indeed."

"To go back to my uncle. 'Failing children of your own, Margery,' he continued, 'there is only one I can name as your successor; there's no other person living to name—and that is the little son of Catherine Grubb.' 'Uncle Francis!' I interrupted, in very astonishment, '*Catherine's* son!' 'Yes; why not?' he answered. 'She offended me, but he has not; and I hear, for I have made enquiries through Pencot, that he is a fine noble little lad; and his name, too, is Francis—Pencot has obtained all necessary information. In the years to come, when he shall be a good man—for Pencot tells me no pains are being spared to make him *that*—perhaps also a great one, he may come here and reign as my successor, a second Sir Francis Netherleigh. In any case he must take the name with the property; it must be made a condition: do not forget that.' I promised that I would not forget it, but I could not get over the surprise I felt. This boy was the son of Christopher Grubb; and it was to him, to his calling, so much objection was raised in the family."

"It does appear rather contradictory on the face of it," agreed Mr. Cleveland.

"Yes. Uncle Francis saw what was in my mind. 'Were the past to come over again,' he observed, 'I might be less harsh with Catherine, less intolerant to him.' 'But Mr. Grubb *is* in trade, is a merchant, just as he was then,' I returned, wonderingly. 'Margery,' said Uncle Francis, 'when our days in this world draw to their close, and we stand on the threshold of another, ideas change. The spirit changes, and the aspect of things changes with it. We see then that the inordinate value we have set on worldly distinctions may have been, to say the least of it, exaggerated; while the principles of right, of justice, become more weighty. What little right or claim there is in the matter, with regard to a successor to Court Netherleigh, lay with Catherine Grant. I have had to substitute you, Margery, for her; but it is *right* that her son should come in after you. I also find that Mr. Grubb's business is of a high standing, altogether different from the ideas we formed of it."

"How did any right lie with Catherine Grant—more than with you or Elizabeth Cleveland?" asked the Rector.

"In this way: Catherine Grant was the most nearly related to Sir Francis. Her mother was his first cousin, whereas my mother and Betsy's mother were but his second cousins. Catherine also was the eldest of the three, by about a year. So you perceive he spoke with reason—that the right of succession, if any right existed, lay with her."

Mr. Cleveland nodded.

"'After you come into possession here, Margery, do not lose time in making your will,' continued Uncle Francis. 'To-morrow I will write down a few particulars to guide you, which you can, at the proper time, show to Pencot. The lad's name, Francis Grubb, will be put in as your successor, and when he comes here, in later years, he must change it to Francis Netherleigh.' 'But,' I rejoined to this, the thought striking me, 'suppose the little boy should grow up a bad man, a man of evil repute, what then?' 'Then,' he said, striking his hand emphatically upon the elbow of his chair, 'I charge you to destroy your first will and make a fresh one. Look out in the world for yourself, and choose a worthy successor—not any one of the Acorns, mind, I have interdicted that; some gentleman of fair and estimable character, who will do his duty earnestly to God and to his neighbour, and who will take my name. *Not* the baronetcy. Unless he were of blood relationship to me, though ever so remote, no plea would exist for petitioning for that. But I think better things of this little boy in question,' he added quickly; 'instinct whispers that he will be found worthy.' As he *is*," emphatically concluded Miss Upton. "And I intend him to be, and hope he will be, a second Sir Francis Netherleigh. I have put things in train for it.

"It is a rather singular coincidence, not unlike a link in a chain," she went on, dreamily, "that the present Prime Minister should be an old habitué of Court Netherleigh; many a week in his boyhood did

he pass here with Uncle Francis, who was very kind to him. We three girls, silly things that we were, used to quarrel amicably which should call him sweetheart. He has continued his friendship with me unto this day; coming down to visit me occasionally. I made a confidant of him during his last visit, telling him what I am now telling you, and I asked him to get this accomplished. He promised faithfully to do so, for our old friendship's sake, and in remembrance of his obligations to Uncle Francis, who had been a substantial friend to him. It would not be difficult, he said, Mr. Grubb assenting —whom, by the way, he esteems greatly. Therefore, you will, I hope, at no very prolonged period after my death, see him reigning here, Sir Francis Netherleigh."

"Has Mr. Grubb assented?" asked the Rector.

Miss Margery shook her head and smiled. "Mr. Grubb knows nothing whatever about the matter. He has no more idea that he will inherit Court Netherleigh than I had that I should inherit it before that revelation to me by Uncle Francis. Were I to say to him, 'Guess who it is, of all the world, that will come in after me,' he would no doubt guess every individual in it before himself, beginning with Lord Acorn. He will know nothing until I am dead. I have written him a farewell letter, which will then reach him, explaining all things; just as I have written out a statement for the world, disclosing the commands laid upon me by Uncle Francis, lest I should be accused of caprice, and—possibly—Mr. Grubb of cupidity."

"You are content to leave him your successor?"

"More than content. I look around and ask myself who else is so worthy. After Uncle Francis's death I was not content. No, I confess it, Catherine had offended all our prejudices, and her child shared them in my mind. But I never thought of disputing the charge laid upon me, and my will was made in the boy's favour. From time to time, as the years passed on, Mr. Pencot brought me reports of him—that he was growing up all that could be wished for. Still, I could not quite put away my prejudice; and whether I should have sought to make acquaintance with him, had chance not brought it about, I cannot say. I met him first at a railway-station

"Did you!" cried Mr. Cleveland, who had never heard of that day's meeting.

"I was going down to Cheltenham with Annis and Marcus, and our train came to grief near Reading; the passengers had to get out while the damage, something to an axle, was tinkered up. Francis Grubb was coming up from the Acorns' place in Oxfordshire; it was during the time he was courting Adela, and the accident to my train stopped his. I was sitting by the wayside disconsolately enough on my little wooden bonnet-box, when one of the nicest-looking and grandest men, for a young man, I ever saw, came up and politely

asked if he could be of any service to me. My liking, my heart, so to say, went out to him at once, his manner was so winning, his countenance so good and noble. Something in his eyes struck me as familiar—you know how beautiful they are—when in another moment my own eyes fell on the name on his hand bag, 'C. Grubb.' Then I remembered that the eyes were Catherine's; and I knew that I saw before me her son and my heir."

"And your prejudice against him ceased from that time," laughed the Rector.

"Entirely, completely. I have learnt to love him, to be proud of him. Catherine cannot feel more pride in her son than I feel in him. But I have never given him the slightest hint that he will inherit Court Netherleigh. Not that I have never felt tempted to do so. When my young Lady Adela has jeered at his name, Grubb, in her contemptuous way, it has been on the tip of my tongue more than once to say to her, He will bear a better sometime. And I have told himself once—or twice—that he was quite safe in letting Acorn borrow money on Court Netherleigh. He is, you see, seeing that it is himself who will come into it: though, of course, he took it to mean that Acorn would."

Mr. Cleveland drew a long breath. These matters had surprised him, but in his heart of hearts he felt thankful that the fine, the rich, the well-cared-for demesnes would become Francis Grubb's and not thriftless George Acorn's.

"Never a word of this abroad until I am gone, my old friend," she enjoined, "not even to your wife; you understand that?"

"I understand it perfectly, dear Miss Upton, and will observe it."

"You will not have long to wait."

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE COLD CHÂTEAU.

A DRAUGHTY old château in Switzerland. Not that it need have been draughty, for it lay at the foot of a mountain that sheltered it from the east winds. But the doors did not fit, and the windows rattled, after the custom of most old châteaux; and so the winter air crept in. It stood in a secluded spot, quite out of the beaten tracks of travellers; and it looked down upon one of the most glorious prospects that even that favoured land can boast.

The prospect in part, and in part the very moderate rent asked for the house, had induced Sir Sandy MacIvor to take it for the autumn months. The MacIvors, though descended from all the kings of Scotland, could not boast of anything very great in the shape of income. Sir Sandy's was small, and he and his wife Lady

Harriet, formerly Harriet Chenevix, had some trouble to make both ends meet. The little baronet was fond of quoting the old saying, that he had to cut his coat according to his cloth. Therefore, when Lady Adela went to them for a prolonged stay, the ample allowance made for her to Sir Sandy was most welcome.

Upon the close of Adela's short visit to Court Netherleigh in the autumn, she returned to her mother. That visit had not been productive of any good result as regarded her cheerfulness of mind and manner; for her life seemed only to grow more dreary. Lady Acorn did not approve of this, and took care daily to let Adela know she did not, dealing out to her sundry reproaches. One day when Adela was unusually low spirited, or, as Lady Acorn called it, grumpy, the Countess made use of a threat—that she should be transported to that gloomy Swiss fastness the MacIvors had settled themselves into, and stop there until she mended her manners.

A chance word sometimes bears fruit. Adela, a faint light rising to her eyes as she heard this, lifted her voice eagerly. "Mother, let me go; send me thither as soon as you please," she said. "It will at least be better for me there than here, for I shall be out of the world."

"Out of the world!" snapped Lady Acorn. "You can't be much more out of it than you are down here in Oxfordshire."

"Yes, I can. The neighbours, those who are at their seats in the country, come in to see us, and papa sometimes brings people home from town. Let me go to Harriet."

It was speedily decided. Lady Acorn, tart though she was with Adela, had her welfare at heart, and she thought the thorough change might be of benefit to her. An old friend, who chanced to be going abroad, took charge of Lady Adela to Geneva, Sir Sandy MacIvor and his wife met her there, and took her back with them to the château.

That was in October. Adela found the château as isolated as she could well desire, and therefore she was pleased with it, and she told Sir Sandy and Harriet she was glad to have come.

They had never thought of staying in this château for the winter; they meant to go to Rome early in December. But as that month approached, Adela evinced a great dislike to move. She would not go to Rome to encounter the English there, she told them; she would stay where she was. It a little perplexed the MacIvors: Adela had grown now so weak and low-spirited that they did not like to cross her, or to insist upon it that she *must* go; neither did they care to give her up as their inmate, for her allowance was of consequence to them.

"What if we make up our minds to stay here for the winter, Harriet?" at length said Sir Sandy, who was as easy-tempered, genial-hearted a little laird as could be met with in or out of Scotland; though he stood but five feet high in his shoes, and nothing could

be seen of his face save his small perky nose standing out of the mass of bright yellow hair which adorned it.

"It will be so cold," grumbled Harriet. "Think of all these draughts."

"They won't hurt," said the laird, who had been bred to such things, his paternal stronghold in the Highlands not being altogether air-tight. "I'll nail some list over the wind-slits, and we'll lay in a good stock of wood and keep up grand fires. It must be as you decide, of course, dear; but Adela can't be left here alone, and if we say she must go with us to Rome, she may fret herself into a fever."

"She is doing that as it is," said Harriet. "We *might* stay here, of course—and we should get the place for an old song during the cold months. Perhaps we had better remain. Though I should like to have been in Rome for the Christmas festivities, and, later, for the carnival."

"We will go next Christmas instead of this," said Sir Sandy.

As they had no children they were not tied to their Scottish home and could lay their plans freely. It was decided to remain in the château for the winter, and Sir Sandy began hammering at the doors and windows.

So they settled down contentedly enough; and, cold though it was in spite of the list and the crackling wood fires, which certainly gave out more sparks than heat, Sir Sandy and his wife made the best of it.

It was more than could be said of Lady Adela. She not only did not make the best of things, but did not try to do so. Not that she complained of the cold, or the heat, or appeared to feel either. All seemed as one to her.

Her room was large, its great old-fashioned sofa and its heavy fauteuils covered with amber velvet. Some uncomfortable looking furniture stood about — mahogany tables and consoles with cold white marble tops. The walls of the room were papered with a running landscape, representing green plains, rivers, blue mountains, sombre pine trees, castles, and picturesque peasants at work in a vineyard. In a recess, shut off with heavy curtains, stood the bed; it was, in fact, a bed-room and sitting-room combined, as is so frequently the case on the Continent.

In a dress of black silk and crape, worn for Margery Upton, who had died the day after Christmas-day, Lady Adela sat in this room near the wood fire. January was wearing to its close. She leaned back in the great yellow arm-chair in listless apathy, her wasted hands lying inertly on her lap, a warm cashmere shawl drawn round her, and two scarlet spots on her once blooming cheeks. The low fever, that, as predicted by Lady Harriet weeks and weeks ago, she was fretting herself into, had too surely attacked her. And she had not seemed in the least to care whether or not she died of it.

"If I die, will my death be sudden?" she one day startled the Swiss doctor by asking him.

"You will not die, you will get well," replied Monsieur Le Brun. "If you will only be reasonable, be it understood, and second our efforts to make you so, by wishing for it yourself," he added.

"I do wish it," she murmured; though her tone was apathetical enough. "But I said to you *if* I die—and I want the question answered, sir. Would there be time to send for any friends from England that I may wish to see."

"Ample time, miladi."

"Harriet," whispered she to her sister that same night, "mind you send for Mr. Grubb when I get into that state that I cannot recover from—if I do get into it. *Will you?*"

"Good gracious, what next!" retorted Harriet. "Who says you will not recover?"

"I could not die in peace without seeing my husband—without asking for his forgiveness," pleaded the poor invalid, bitter tears of regret for the past slowly coursing down her cheeks. "You will be sure to send in time, won't you, Harriet?"

"Yes, yes, I promise it," answered Harriet, humouring the fancy; and she set herself to kiss and soothe her sister.

Lady Harriet MacIvor, who resembled her mother more than any of the rest, both in person and quickness of temper, had been tart enough with Adela before the illness declared itself, freely avowing that she had no patience with people who fretted themselves sick; but when the fever had really come she became a tender and efficient nurse.

The sickness and the danger passed—though, of danger, there had not perhaps been very much—and Adela was up again. With the passing, Lady Harriet resumed her tendency to set the world and its pilgrims to rights, especially Adela. January was well on now.

The fever had left her very weak. In fact, it had not yet wholly taken itself away. She would recline in the large easy chair, utterly inert, day after day, recalling dreams of the past. Thinking of the luxurious home she had lost, one that might have been all brightness; picturing how she would do this and that to render it so, were the opportunity still hers.

For hours she would lose herself in recollections of the child she had lost—the little boy, George. A rush of fever would pass through her veins as she recalled her behaviour at its baptism: her scornful rejection of her husband's name, Francis; her unseemly interruption from her bed to the clergyman that the name should be George. How she yearned after the little child now! Had he lived—why, surely her husband would not have put her away from him! A man may not, and does not, put away the mother of his child; it could never have been. Would she have had the child—or he? Would he have kept it, or allowed her to take it? No, no; with that

precious, living tie between them, his and hers, he could not have thrust his wife away from him. Oh, surely, surely ! had that poor child but lived, he would have exercised compassion. Thus she would lie, tormenting herself with deceitful fantasies that could never be, and wake up with a shudder to the miserable reality.

Enough of the fever lingered yet to tinge with hectic the cheeks of her white face, and to heat her trembling hands. But for one thought Adela would not have cared whether she died or lived—at least, she told herself so in her mind's misery ; and that thought was that, if she died, her husband might take another wife. A wife who would give him back what she herself had not given—love for love. Since Miss Upton, perhaps unwittingly, had breathed that suggestion, it had not left Adela night or day.

How bitterly she regretted the past none knew, or ever would know. During these weeks of illness, before the fever and since, she had leisure, and to spare, to dwell upon her conduct in it ; to repent of it ; to pray to Heaven for pardon for it. The approach of possible death, the stinging presence of hopeless misery, had brought Adela to that Refuge which she had never sought or found before, an ever-merciful God. Never again, even were it possible that she should once more mingle with the world, could she be the frivolous, heartless, unchristian woman she had been—not to speak of graver sins. Nothing in a small way had ever surprised Lady Harriet so much, as to find Adela get out her Bible and Prayer-book and keep them near her.

She sat to day, buried as usual in the past, the bitter anguish its remembrance always brought her rending her soul. We are told in holy writ that the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked. The heart of woman is undoubtedly contradictory. When Adela was Mr. Grubb's wife she had done her best to scorn and despise him, to persuade herself she hated him : now that he was lost to her for ever, she had grown to love him, passionately as ever man was loved by woman. The very fact that relations between them could never be renewed but fostered this love. For Lady Adela knew better than to deceive herself with vain hopes ; she knew that to cherish them would be the veriest mockery, that when Francis Grubb threw her off, it was for ever.

Many a moment did she spend now regretting that she had not died in the fever. It would at least have brought about a last interview ; for Harriet would have kept her word and sent for him.

" Better for me to die than live," she murmured to herself, lifting her fevered hand. " I could have died happily with his forgiving kisses on my lips. Whereas to live is nothing but pain ; weariness—and who knows how many years my life will last ? "

Davvy came in ; a tumbler in her hand containing an egg beaten up with wine and milk. Davvy did not choose to abandon her mistress in her sickness and misfortunes, but Davvy considered

herself the most ill-used lady's maid that fate could produce. Buried alive in this dismal, bleak place in a foreign country, where the companions with whom she consorted, the other domestics, spoke a language that was barbarous and unintelligible, Davvy wondered when it would end.

"I don't want it," said Adela, turning from the glass and from Davvy.

"But Lady Harriet says you must take it, my lady. She put the wine in herself, and bade me run up with it while it was warm. You'll never get your strength up, my lady, if you refuse nourishment."

"I don't care to get my strength up. If you'd bring me some wine and water, Davvy, instead, I could drink that. Or some tea—or lemonade. I am very thirsty."

"And what good is there in tea or lemonade?" returned Davvy, who ventured to contend now as she never had when her lady was in health, coaxing her also sometimes as if she were a child. "Lady Harriet said if you would not take this from me, my lady, she should have to come herself. And she does not want to come; she's busy."

To hear that Harriet was busy seemed something new. "What is she busy over?" languidly asked Adela.

"Talking," answered Davvy. "Some English traveller has turned out of his way to call on her and Sir Sandy, my lady, and he is giving them all the home news."

"Oh," was the indifferent comment of Lady Adela. Home news was nothing to her now. And, to put an end to Davvy's importunity, she drank the refreshment without further objection.

Margery Upton had died and was buried: and her will, when it became known, created a nine days' wonder in London. Amidst those assembled to hear its reading, the mourners, who had just returned from the churchyard, none was more utterly astonished than Mr. Grubb. Never in his whole life had such an idea—that he would be the inheritor of Court Netherleigh—occurred to him. Miss Upton's statement of why it was left to him, as explained by her by word of mouth to Mr. Cleveland, was read out after the will; and Francis Grubb found a private letter, written by her to himself, put into his hand.

Lord Acorn was similarly astonished. Intensely so. Unpleasantly so. Though, in his débonnaire manner, he carried it off with easy indifference, not letting his mortification appear. Perhaps he had not in his heart felt so sure of Court Netherleigh as he had allowed the world to think: Miss Upton's warnings might not have been quite lost upon him. Failing himself, he would rather Francis Grubb had it than anyone; there might be no trouble about those over-due bonds; though Lord Acorn, always sanguine, had not allowed himself to dream of such a catastrophe as this.

Perhaps the most unwelcome minor item in the affair to Lord Acorn, was having to carry the news to his wife at home. It was evening when he got there; he and Mr. Grubb having travelled up together: for the easy-natured peer did not intend to turn the cold shoulder to his son-in-law because he had supplanted him.

"Will you give me a bit of dinner, Frank?" asked the Earl, as they got into a cab together at the terminus, only too willing to put off the evil quart d'heure with my lady as long as might be.

"I will give it you, and welcome, if there is any to give," smiled Mr. Grubb. "I left no orders for dinner to-day, not knowing when I should be back."

Alighting in Grosvenor Square, they found some dinner was to be had. Afterwards, Lord Acorn went home. His wife, attired in one of Mme. Damereau's best black silk gowns, garnished with a crape apron, was sitting in the small drawing-room, all impatience.

"Well, you *are* late!" cried she. "What can have kept you until now?"

"It is only ten o'clock," replied the Earl, drawing a chair to the fire. "At work, Gracie!" he added, turning to his daughter, who sat at the table, busy with her tatting.

"Only ten o'clock!" snapped the Countess. "I expected you at five or six. And now—how are things left? I suppose we have Court Netherleigh?"

"Well, no; we have not," quietly replied Lord Acorn.

"*Not!*"

"Not at all. Grubb is made the heir. He has Court Netherleigh —and is to take the name."

Lady Acorn's face, in its petrified astonishment, its righteous indignation, would have made a model for Sir David Wilkie. Not for a couple of minutes did she speak; voice and words alike failed her.

"The deceitful wretch!" broke from her at length. "To play the sneak with Margery in that way!"

"Don't waste your breath over a mistake, Betsy. Grubb knew nothing about it; is more surprised than you are. Court Netherleigh was willed to him when Margery first came into it; when he was a young lad. She but carried out the directions of Sir Francis Netherleigh."

Lady Acorn was beginning to breathe again. But she was not the less angry.

"I don't care. It is no better than a swindle. How *deceitful* Margery must have been!"

"She kept counsel—if you mean that. As to being deceitful—no, I don't see it. She never did, or would, admit that the estate would come to us; discouraged the idea, in fact."

"All the same, it is a frightful blow. We were *reckoning* on it. Was nobody in her confidence?"

"Nobody whatever, save the old lawyer, Pincot. Two or three weeks before she died she disclosed all to Cleveland in a confidential interview. As it is not ourselves, I am heartily glad it's Grubb."

"What has she done with all her accumulated money?" tartly went on her ladyship. "She must have saved a heap of it, living in the inexpensive way she did!"

"Yes, there is a pretty good lot of that," equably replied the Earl. "It is left to one and another; legacies here, legacies there. I don't come in for one."

"No! What a shame!"

"You do, though," resumed Lord Acorn, stretching out his boots to the warmth of the fire. "You get ten thousand pounds."

The words were to the Countess as a very sop in the pan. Her fiery face became a little calmer.

"Is it so?" she asked.

"Quite so," nodded the Earl. "You don't get it in a lump, though, without conditions. Only the interest for life; the sum itself then goes to Grace, here. I congratulate you, Gracie, my dear."

Grace let fall her shuttle; her colour rose. "Oh, papa! And—and—what do my sisters have?" she added, ever, in her unselfishness, thinking of others.

"Mary, Harriet, and Frances get a thousand pounds each; Sarah and Adela only some trinkets as a remembrance. I suppose Margery thought they were well married and did not require money."

"And, papa, who else comes in?" asked Grace, glancing across at her mother, who sat beating her foot on the carpet.

"Who else? Let me see. Thomas Cleveland has two thousand pounds. And Mrs. Dalrymple, the elder, has a thousand. And several of Margery's servants are provided for. And—and I think that's about all I remember."

"The furniture at Court Netherleigh?" interrupted Lady Acorn. "Who takes that?"

"Grubb; he takes everything pertaining to the house and estate; everything that was Sir Francis Netherleigh's. He is left residuary legatee. Margery Upton has only willed away what was her own of right."

"As if he wanted it!" grumbled Lady Acorn, giving a twitch to her new apron.

"The less one needs things, the more one gets them, as it seems to me. The baronetcy is to be renewed in him, Betsy."

"The baronetcy! In *him!*"

"Sir Francis wished it. There will not be much delay in the matter, either. Margery Upton put things en train for it before she died."

Lady Acorn could only reply by a stare; and there ensued a pause.

"The idiot that little minx Adela has shown herself!" was her final comment. "Court Netherleigh, it seems, would have been hers."

The little minx Adela, wasting away with fever in her Swiss abode, knew nothing of all this, and cared less. But the barest items of news concerning it came to the MacIvors; Grace wrote to Harriet to say that Court Netherleigh had been willed to Mr. Grubb, not to her father, but in that first letter she gave no details. That much was told to Adela. She aroused herself sufficiently to ask who had Court Netherleigh, and was told that Margery Upton had left it to Mr. Grubb.

"I knew he was a great favourite of hers," was all the comment she made; and but for the sudden flush, Lady Harriet might have thought the news was perfectly indifferent to her: and she made no further allusion to it, then or afterwards.

But of the particulars, I say, Sir Sandy and Lady Harriet remained in ignorance, for Grace did not write again. Nobody else wrote. And their extreme surprise at Mr. Grubb's inheritance had become a thing of the past, when one day a traveller, recently from England, found out them and the old château. It was Captain Frederic Cust, brother to the John Cust who stuttered. The Custs and the Acorns had always been very intimate; the young Cust lads, there were six of them, and the Ladies Chenevix had played and quarrelled together as boys and girls. Captain Cust knew all about the Court Netherleigh inheritance, and supplied the information lacking, until then, to Sir Sandy and Lady Harriet MacIvor. No wonder Davvy had said that Lady Harriet was too busy to go up stairs: she was as fond of talking as her mother.

And so, the abuse they had been mutually lavishing upon Mr. Grubb in private for these two or three past weeks they found to be unmerited. He was the lucky inheritor, it is true, but through no complicity of his own.

"You might have known that," said Captain Cust, upon Lady Harriet's candidly avowing this. "Grubb is the most honourable man living; he would not do an underhand deed to be made king of England to-morrow. I am surprised you could think it of him for a moment, Harriet."

"You be quiet, Fred," she retorted. "It was not an unnatural thought. The best of men will stretch a point of conscience when such a property as Court Netherleigh is in question."

"Grubb would not. And he could have bought such a place any day, had he a mind to do it."

"And to take up the baronetcy! You are sure that is true?"

"Sure and certain. And I wish him joy with all my heart! There's not one of nous autres in the social world but would welcome him into our order with drums and trumpets."

Lady Harriet laughed. "You are just the goose you used to be, Fred."

"No doubt," assented Captain Frederic. "Where's the use of being anything better in such a silly world as this? Your wife has always paid me compliments, MacIvor, since the time when we were in pinafores."

"Just as she does me," nodded little Sir Sandy. "And how is Mr. Grubb?—I liked him, too, Captain. Does he still keep up that great big establishment in Grosvenor Square, all for himself?"

"Yes. Why shouldn't he? He's rich enough to keep up ten such. By the way, he is a member of Parliament now—do you know it? They've returned him for Wheatshire."

And thus the conversation continued. But we need not follow it.

After Captain Cust left at night, for he stayed the day with them, Lady Harriet sat in silent thought, apparently weighing some matter in her mind.

"Sandy," she said at length, looking across at him, "I don't think I shall tell Adela anything about this—I mean that her husband is to take the baronetcy. It will be better not."

"Why?" asked Sir Sandy.

"It will bring her past folly home to her so severely. It might bring all the fever back again."

"As you please of course, dear. But she did not seem to care at all when told he had inherited Netherleigh."

"That's all you know about it, Sandy!" retorted Lady Harriet. "*I* saw—all the light in her eyes and the flush in her cheeks. I tell you, sir, she is in love with her husband now, though she may never have been before, and it will try her too greatly, in her sick state. Her chief bone of contention in the old days was his name; that's removed now. And she has forfeited that lovely place, Court Netherleigh!"

"You know best, my dear. Perhaps it will be kinder not to tell her. But you will have to caution Davvy, and those about her: this is news that will not rest in a nutshell. But," remarked Sir Sandy after a pause, "with all deference to your superior judgment, Harriet, I do not think she can care much more for her husband now than she cared of yore."

"Listen, Sandy," was the whispered answer; "yesterday evening at dusk I went softly up to Adela's room, and peeped in to see whether she was dozing. She sat in the fire-light, her head bent over that little old photograph she has of Mr. Grubb. Suddenly she gave a yearning kind of cry, and began raining tears and kisses upon it."

CHAPTER XXX.

ADELA STARTLED.

In a small "appartement" in the Champs Elysées, so small, indeed, that the whole of it could have almost been put into the big salon of the château in Switzerland, and in its little drawing-room, sat Lady Harriet MacIvor and M. le Docteur Féron. Lady Adela sat in it also; but she went for nobody now. It was a lovely April day; the sun shone in through the crimson draperies of the window, flowers were budding, the trees were already in their first fresh green.

M. le Docteur Féron and Lady Harriet were talking partly to, partly *at* Adela. Inert, listless, dispirited, she paid little or no attention to them, or to anything they might choose to say: life and its interests seemed to be no longer of moment to her.

When we saw her in January she was getting better from the low fever. But she did not get well. The fever did subside in a degree, but the weakness and the listlessness remained. Do what they would, Sir Sandy and his wife could not rouse her from her apathy. Sir Sandy tried reasoning and amusement; Lady Harriet alternately soothed and ridiculed; Davvy, even, ventured now and again on a good scold. It was all one.

That exposé the previous summer, when she was put away by her husband, seemed to have changed Adela's very nature. At first her mood was a resentful one; then it became repentant: that was succeeded by one of heart-sickening remorse. Remorse for her own line of conduct during the past years. With the low fever in Switzerland, she began to think of serious things. The awakening to the responsibilities that lie upon us all to remember and prepare for a future and better state—which awakening comes to us all sooner or later in a greater or a less degree—came to Lady Adela. She saw what her past life had been, all its mocking contempt for what was good, its supreme indifference, its intense selfishness. Night by night on her bended knees, amid sobs and bitter tears, she besought forgiveness of the Most High God. Her cheeks turned red with shame whenever she thought of her kind and good husband, and of how she had requited him. Lady Harriet was right, too, in her surmise—that Adela had now grown to *love* her husband. How full of contradictions is this human heart of ours, experience shows us more greatly day by day. When she could have indulged that love, she threw it contemptuously from her; now that the time had gone by for it, it was growing into something like idolatry.

Adela did not get better; perhaps, with this distressed frame of mind, much improvement was not to be looked for. At length the MacIvors grew alarmed, and resolved to take her to Paris for change and for better advice. Adela, contrary to expectation, made no

objection; it seemed as though she no longer cared a straw where she went, or what became of her. "If we offered to box her up in a coffin and bury her in the ground for good and all, I don't believe she'd say no," tartly spoke Lady Harriet one day to the laird. To Paris they came, reaching it during March, and M. le Docteur Féron was at once called in, a man of great repute among the English. It was now April, and M. le Docteur, with all his skill, had done nothing.

"But truly there's no reason in it, miladi," he was saying this fine day, to Lady Harriet, in English, the language he generally chose to use with his patients, however perfectly they might speak his own. "Miladi Adela has nothing grave amiss with her; absolutely nothing. To sit as she does has no reason in it. There is no sense common within it."

"As I tell her continually," rejoined Lady Harriet, smiling to herself at his quaint phrases.

"What illness she has rests on the nerves, see you," proceeded the doctor. "A little on the mind. The earliest day I saw her I did ask whether she did have one great shock, or trouble: you remember of that, do you not, madame?"

"But—good gracious!—one ought not to give way perpetually to any shock, or trouble—even if one has had such a thing," remonstrated Lady Harriet.

"As I say. Can anything be more clear? Miladi has nothing to render her sick, and yet miladi sits there, all sick, day after day.—— You hear, miladi?"—turning to Lady Adela.

"Oh, yes, I hear," she gently answered, lifting her wan but still lovely face for a moment, and then letting it droop again.

"And it is time to finish this state of things," resumed the doctor to Lady Harriet. "It must be finished, see you, madame."

"It ought to be," acquiesced Lady Harriet. "But if she does not end it herself, how are *we* to do it?"

"You go out yourself, madame, with monsieur, your husband, into a little society, cheerful: is it not so?" spoke the doctor, after a pause of consideration, during which he stroked his face with his gloved hand.

"Of course we do, M. Féron; we are not hermits, and Paris is gay just now," quickly answered Lady Harriet. "We go to the Blunts' to-night."

"Then take her at once also; take her with you. That may be tried. If it does not result, truly I shall not know what to propose. Drugs are hopeless in a case like this," added the doctor as he made two elaborate bows, one to each lady, and went out.

"Now, Adela, you *hear!*" began Lady Harriet, the moment the door closed, and her voice was sternly resolute. "We have tried everything, and now we shall try this. You go with us to Mrs. Blunt's to-night."

She did not refuse—wonderful to be able to say it. She folded her hands upon her chest and sighed in resignation: too worn out to combat longer; or, perhaps, too apathetical.

"What is it, Harriet? Not a dinner?"

"Oh dear no. An evening party: a crowd, I daresay. Music I think. And now I shall go and talk to Davvy about what you are to wear," concluded Lady Harriet, escaping from the room lest there should come a tardy opposition. But Adela never made it. It seemed to her that she was quite worn out with it all; with the antagonism and the preaching, and the doctors and Harriet; well-nigh wearied to death. Davvy dressed her plainly enough; a black net robe with black trimmings; and Lady Adela quietly submitted, saying neither yes nor no. "Just as if she had been asleep all the while," remarked Davvy afterwards; "as if her body had been here and her mind and senses somewhere else!"

"Don't let me be announced, Harriet," pleaded Adela, as they were going along. "Nobody cares to hear my name now. I can creep in behind you and Sir Sandy."

Mr. and Mrs. Blunt's house was small and their company large. Lady Harriet expected a crowd, and she met with it. Adela, unannounced according to her wish, shook hands with Mrs. Blunt, and escaped into a small recess at the end of the further reception-room. It was draped off by crimson-and-gold curtains, and she sat down, thankful to be alone. She turned giddy: the noise, the lights, the crowd unnerved her. It was so long now since she had mingled in anything of the kind.

She sat on there, and began thinking *when* the last time had been. It came into her memory with a rush. The last time she had made one in these large gatherings was at her own home in Grosvenor Square, not very many days before she finally left it. Ay, and the attendant circumstances also came back to her, even to the words which had passed between herself and her husband. In the bitter contempt she cherished for him, she had not chosen to inform him of the assembly she purposed having, but sent the cards out unknown to him. Not a syllable did she say, and he knew nothing about it until the night arrived and he came home to dinner.

"What is the awning up for?" he asked of Hilson, wondering a little.

"My lady has a large assembly to night, sir," was the answer.

"A large one?"

"Very, sir."

Mr. Grubb knitted his brow, and went on to his wife. It was not the fact of the assembly that vexed him; it was that she had not made it worth her while to inform him of it.

Davvy was putting the finishing touches to her hair. How well she remembered it now; every minute particular came back to her, bit by bit: where she sat in the room—not at the dressing-glass as

usual, but before the open window, for it was intensely hot. Her robe was a costly white lace adorned with pearls.

"What is this, Adela?" he had asked. "I hear you have a large assembly to-night."

"Well?" she retorted.

"Could you not have told me?"

"I did not see any especial necessity for telling you."

"I might have had an engagement. In fact, I have one. I ought to go to one of the hotels to-night to see a gentleman who has come over from India on business."

"You can go," was her scornful reply to this. "Your presence is not needed here; it is not at all necessary to the success of the evening."

"There is one, at any rate, who would not miss me; and that is yourself," had been his reply as he left her, to go to his room to dress for dinner. Yes, it all came back vividly to-night.

She bent her face in her hands as she recalled this, hiding it in very shame that she could have been so wicked. Lady Sarah Hope had once told her the devil had got possession of her. "Not only the devil," moaned Adela now, "but all his myrmidons."

Someone was beginning to sing; a lady. She had a sweet and powerful voice, and she chose a song that Mr. Grubb used to be particularly fond of—"Robin Adair."

Adela looked beyond the draperies at the moving crowd, gathering itself up for a momentary stillness, and disposed herself to listen. Her thoughts were full of Mr. Grubb, as the verses went on. Every word came home to her aching heart.

"But him I loved so well
Still in my heart doth dwell—
Oh, I shall ne'er forget
Robin Adair."

Applause ensued. It was much better deserved than that mostly accorded in these cases. A minute later, and some one called out "Hush, hush!" for the lady had consented to sing again. The noise subsided into silence; the singer was turning over the leaves of her music-book.

To this silence there arose an interruption. Mr. Blunt's English butler appeared, announcing a late guest:

"Sir Francis Netherleigh."

The man had a low, sonorous voice, and every syllable penetrated to Lady Adela's ear. The name struck on the chords of her memory. Sir Francis Netherleigh! Why, he had been dead many a year. Could another Sir Francis Netherleigh be in existence? What did it mean?—for it must be remembered that all such news had been and was still kept from her. Lady Adela gazed out from her obscure vantage-ground.

Not for a minute or two did she see anything: the company was dense. Then, threading his way through the line made for him, advanced a man of noble form and distinguished face, the form and face of him she had once called husband. A sound, as of terror, escaped her.

He was in evening dress, and in mourning. He seemed to be making direct for the recess, for Adela; and she shrank behind the draperies to hide herself.

For a moment all things seemed to be in a mist, inwardly and outwardly. What brought Mr. Grubb *there*—and who was the Sir Francis Netherleigh that had been announced, and where was he?

Not to Adela had he been advancing, neither did he see her. Mrs. Blunt chanced to be standing before the recess; it was to her he was making his way.

"How do you do, Sir Francis?" she warmly exclaimed, meeting his hand. "It is so good of you to come: my husband thought you would not be able to spare the time."

"I thought so also when I spoke to him this afternoon," was the answer given, in the earnest, pleasant tones Adela remembered so well. "My stay in Paris is but for a few hours this time. Where is Mr. Blunt?"

"I saw him close by a minute ago. Ah, there he is—John," called out Mrs. Blunt, "here is Sir Francis Netherleigh."

They both moved off towards the fire-place; the crowd closed behind them, hiding them from sight, and Adela breathed again. So then, *he* was Sir Francis Netherleigh! How had it all come about?

Gathering her shawl around her, she escaped from the recess and glided through the room with bent head. In the outer room, opening to the corridor and the staircase, she came upon her sister.

"Harriet, I must go," she feverishly uttered. "I can't stay here."

"Oh, indeed!" said Lady Harriet. "Well—I don't know."

"If there's no carriage waiting, I can have a cab; or I can walk. It will not hurt me. I shall find my way through the streets."

She ran down the stairs. Harriet felt obliged to follow her. "Will you call up Sir Sandy MacIvor's carriage," asked Lady Harriet of the servants standing below. "Adela, do wait an instant! One would think the house was on fire."

"I must go; I must get away," was the eager, terrified interruption, and Adela bore on to the outer door.

The carriage was called, and came up. In point of fact Sir Sandy and his wife had privately agreed to keep it waiting, in case Adela should turn faint in the unusual scene, and have to leave. In the porte cochère they encountered a lady who was but then arriving.

"What, going already!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," replied Lady Harriet; "and I wish you would just tell Sir

Sandy for me: you will be sure to see him somewhere in the rooms. Say my sister does not feel well and we have gone home."

The entering guest nodded. They passed out to the carriage, and were soon bowling along the streets. Adela drew into her corner, cowering and shivering.

"Did you see him?" she gasped.

"Oh, yes, I saw him," grumblingly responded Lady Harriet, who was not best pleased at having to quit the gay scene in this summary fashion. "I am sure Sandy will conclude we have been spirited away, unless Mrs. Seymour finds him. A fine flurry he'll be in."

"Harriet, what did it mean? They called him Sir Francis Netherleigh."

"He is Sir Francis Netherleigh."

"Since when? Why did you not tell me?"

"He has been Francis Netherleigh since Aunt Margery died: the name came to him with the property. He has been *Sir* Francis since—oh, for about six weeks now. Uncle Francis wished the baronetcy to be revived in him, and his wishes have been carried out."

Adela paused, apparently revolving the information. "Then his name is no longer Grubb?"

"In one sense, no. For all social uses that name has passed from him."

"Why did you never tell me of this?" repeated Adela.

"From the uncertainty as to whether you would care to hear it, Adela. We decided to say nothing until you were stronger."

A second pause of thought. "If he has succeeded to the name, why, so have I. Have I not? Though he puts me away from himself, Harriet, he cannot take from me his name."

"Of course you have succeeded to it."

Pause the third. "Then I ought to have been announced to-night as Lady Adela Netherleigh!"

"Had you been announced at all. You solved the difficulty, you know, by telling me you would not be announced—that you would creep in after me and Sandy."

"The difficulty! What difficulty?"

"Well, had you heard yourself called Netherleigh, you would have wanted to know, there and then, the why and the wherefore. It might have created a small commotion."

Pause the fourth. "Who is he in mourning for? Aunt Margery?"

"And also for his mother. Mrs. Lynn lived just long enough to see him take up the baronetcy. I think it must have gratified her—that her son should be the one to succeed at last. *She* would have had Court Netherleigh in the old days, Adela, had she not displeased Uncle Francis by her marriage, not Margery Upton. He told Margery so when he was dying."

"The world seems full of changes," sighed Adela.

"It always was, and always will be. But I fancy the right mostly comes uppermost in the end," added Lady Harriet. "Where is Mary Lynn, you ask? She lives with Sir Francis in Grosvenor Square; the house's mistress."

Adela ceased her questioning. Amid the many items for reflection suggested to her by the news, was this: that the once hated name of Grubb had been suppressed for ever. There flashed across her a reminiscence of a day in the past autumn, when she was last staying at Court Netherleigh. She had been giving some scorn to the name, after her usual custom, and Margery Upton had answered it with a most peculiar look. Adela did not understand the look then: she did now. That expressive look, had she been able to read it, might have told her that Mr. Grubb would not long retain the name. Adela shrank closer into the corner of the carriage and pressed her hands upon her burning eyes. The blindness that she had shown! The foolish, infatuated woman she had been!

"Did you notice how noble he looked to-night?" she softly said, after awhile.

"He always did look noble, Adela. Here we are."

The carriage drew up to the door. As Lady Harriet, after getting out herself, turned to give her hand to Adela, weak enough still to require especial care, she did not find it responded to.

"Are you asleep, child? Come. We are at home."

"I beg your pardon, Harriet," was the meek answer.

She had only been waiting to stem the torrent of tears flowing forth. Lady Harriet saw them glistening on her wasted cheeks by the light of the carriage lamps. Bitter tears, telling of a breaking heart.

"Sandy," observed Lady Harriet to her husband that night, "I do not see that a further stay here will be of benefit to Adela. We may as well be making preparations for our journey to the Highlands."

"Just as you please," acquiesced Sir Sandy. "I, you know, would rather be in the Highlands than anywhere else. Fix your own time."

"Then we will start next week," decided Lady Harriet.

(*To be continued.*)

AMONG THE HUNGARIANS.

IT was during the Carnival at Vienna that I first made the acquaintance of the Countess Zitvay and her two charming daughters. They had come up from Hungary for the balls and other amusements of the season, and we met frequently at the house of a mutual friend.

The Viennese aristocracy have, at times, the disagreeable peculiarity of considering themselves very much better than their neighbours, especially should those neighbours have had the misfortune to be born on the eastern side of the Danube; and my preconceived notions of Hungarian talent and character were so frequently met in Vienna with cold shrugs of the shoulder, that I grew impatient to see and judge for myself. Hence I became a frequent visitor at the house of the Countess W——, where not only the Zitvays were often to be seen, but quite a little Hungarian colony was wont to assemble.

Eager-eyed, impatient politicians dilated on the wrongs and abuses of the Government, pulling their heavy moustaches and gesticulating fiercely. Hunting, shooting, and horse-racing were discussed by the younger men as though they were the only interests in life; beautiful Transylvanians, with complexions like white roses, long, heavy-lidded, dark-blue eyes, and a truly Oriental indolence, sat, half-reclining, among cushions, in deep contemplation of their exquisite hands and finger-nails. And every now and then one of the party would be drawn to the piano, literally to astonish the weak nerves of at least one member of the community by their rare talent for music, which seems innate in the Hungarian race—a talent known to Europe through the wonderful playing of Liszt, and existing, unknown except in their own immediate circle, in hundreds of the Magyars.

I had been seated, one evening, for some time, in a very comfortable corner of Countess W——'s drawing-room, near the Countess Zitvay, whose still lovely face and charm of conversation had always a magnetic attraction for me, when our hostess drew near, with a remark upon the music to which we had just been listening.

I observed that I had been very much puzzled by it. The sudden changes from fast to slow, from melancholy, long drawn-out chords to a gay air, played at headlong speed and in most extraordinary time, had completely bewildered me. Besides which, so many other instruments had appeared somehow to have got into the piano, and to be playing variations on their own account, that I lost all notion of the tune, if there were any.

"Oh, you cold-blooded Englishman!" exclaimed the Countess

W——. "Why, it was the Csardas—our national dance! Did you not see how half the assembly, even the oldest and gravest men, and the laziest Transylvanian girls, could not keep their feet from moving in time? And you sit philosophically still and criticise, while each note of that inspiriting air sets everyone else's blood dancing in their veins."

"I humbly apologise for being an Englishman," I replied; "but, you see, my preferences were not consulted as to my nationality. I never heard a Csardas played before, and certainly never saw it danced; so, perhaps, my philosophical composure may be excused on those grounds."

"Be merciful to him, Wanda," said the Countess Zitvay. "It is really almost impossible to render real Hungarian music upon a piano. To appreciate it properly, one should hear it played by the gipsies on their own instruments in the open air. It is far too proper and methodical upon the piano." And then, turning to me: "You must hear it when the peasants dance the Csardas to it, when every man among them goes wild over it—when they laugh, cry, stamp and shout, just as the music commands. You ought to see a vintage."

"That indeed must be a pleasure," I replied, "and it would be something entirely new to me."

"Then come and see it with us. I have heard that you are going to Transylvania this summer, and, in returning, you must pay us a visit. My husband will be delighted to welcome an Englishman. If you could time it towards the end of September, we would show you a real vintage, and teach you to dance the Csardas yourself to the music of the gipsies."

I thanked her heartily for the invitation, which I accepted with pleasure, humbly suggesting, however, as regarded my Csardas dancing, that my limbs not being composed of gutta-percha, and strung together on electric wire, as I had heard was usually the case among the Hungarians, it might, perhaps, be more advisable for me not to make an exhibition of myself in that way.

A pleasant little note of invitation reminded me of my promise during the summer; and thus it happened that, in the end of the following September, I found myself on the railway between Transylvania and Pesth: the thermometer between eighty and ninety degrees in the shade, and the train crawling along at what seemed about the rate of five miles an hour.

The picture before me was not inviting. As far as eye could see, stretched an immense plain, unbroken by even a hillock, and burning beneath a fiery sun. Over the yellow fields of Indian corn, and the acres of pale stubble ground, gleaming almost white in the quivering heat of the air, was arched the great vault of blue without a single cloud. Here and there one might trace the windings of broad white roads, over which hovered fine dust like a morning fog.

But now the train modified its already less than moderate speed; a line of low whitewashed houses came in sight, and I discovered that I was arriving at my destination.

A change from the stifling air of the railway carriage to what resembled the steadfast, burning heat of an oven, and presently I was astonished to see—emerging from a group of Wallachians in long sheepskin cloaks—the incongruous figure of a footman in English livery.

The man came up to me, and touching his hat, announced that he was sent by Count Zitvay, and that the carriage was waiting. This announcement, however, did not agree with his costume, for it was made, not in English, but in German, and with a strong Hungarian accent, that by this time I had learned to recognize.

He made way for me among the groups of lounging and squatting peasants, and in a few moments we were raising suffocating clouds of dust on the road to the village.

This road, being the chief thoroughfare of the village, was nearly a quarter of a mile wide, so that there was room on both sides of the carriage track, as it went meandering and zig-zaging along, for broad ditches, either dried and cracking into huge fissures in the sun, or still containing filthy stagnant water, on which a few sleepy ducks and geese tried to gratify their aquatic tendencies.

At last we jolted and rattled into the village. On either side the principal street (the ditches serving as a kind of ornamental front garden) were rows of thatched cottages or huts, standing sideways towards the road, each having a yard or court separating it from its neighbour and shut off from the general public by a great wooden gate, under which fierce-looking curs squeezed sometimes their heads, and sometimes their whole bodies, while joining in a general chorus of indignation at my arrival.

The houses are all built in the same style—long, low, straight, and whitewashed, and are constructed out of the mud which forms the principal feature of the surrounding country.

If one of the inhabitants wishes to be accommodated with a family residence, he makes arrangements for digging a considerable hole somewhere in the neighbourhood, and with the material thus acquired erects himself a desirable tenement with one door, and two very small windows, warranted not to open. Here he installs himself and family, and perhaps a few friends, and, if he is well off, a few pigs and geese.

In the course of time it is very probable that the holes dug by these enterprising Hungarians with a view to the erection of family mansions, may fill with water—as they generally do, considering that the land around is rather of a swampy nature; but that does not disquiet them. So much the better for the ducks and geese—what would those interesting birds do without water? This water, having no outlet, becomes slightly disagreeable after a time; then more so,

then very much more so; until at last the combined odours of that and the ditches—always before the houses—render the evening breezes and soft summer airs of so extremely peculiar a character that the adventurous stranger penetrating into these regions for the first time in the hot season is filled with wonder and admiration at the strength of the olfactory nerves of the natives.

These circumstances might, perhaps, be considered to have some slight influence on the sanitary returns of the community: and rash people have gone so far as to say that it is partly owing to this state of things that every third person is down with the fever at intervals during the whole year. But the natives scorn such insinuations; they like good strong air, say they; none of your insipid, scentless breezes. So they sit before their ditches, feel the odour tickle their brains and nostrils like snuff, and enjoy themselves.

All these things I learnt later; for now, while driving by, with the sun pouring its rays upon my head, baking and blistering the skin upon my nose, my powers of observation were none of the keenest.

Before most of these buildings were wooden forms or stools, on which women and children lounged; and where there were none, they crouched upon the earth and stared at the passers-by.

The costume of the inhabitants, who were Hungarians mixed with a Wallachian colony, was of the very simplest description—the children either in a state of nature or clothed only in a coarse white shirt. The women add to this a petticoat, and frequently a kerchief tied under the chin; and the men appeared to have on, besides the shirt, which barely reached to the waist, a sort of white petticoat, so loose, fringed, and flowing were their pantaloons. These men wore also, in many cases, a waistcoat, or sleeveless jacket, with rows of buttons like pewter marbles, and their national headgear had a strong resemblance to a Turkish fez.

After about twenty minutes' jolting we turned a corner, and at last something came in sight which, though dusty and dry, still bore the semblance of vegetation. A long, walled hedge appeared, over which green bushes were growing, and groups of graceful acacia trees. Then came the carriage gate, and leaving the glaring, suffocating, high-road, we drove through welcome shade and greenness up to the house.

My reception was so thoroughly kind and hospitable as to make me feel at once at home. After the hours I had already spent that day in an atmosphere like that of an oven, and in weary contemplation of miles of flat, monotonous, sunburnt country, I felt as though I had been suddenly translated to Paradise.

The house was very large—built almost in the shape of a T, with stone corridors running along on one side. All the rooms being on the ground floor, and the walls immensely thick, the great heat and staring light were deliciously tempered. After a refreshing bath, I was guided by a polite, well-trained footman along the stone passages,

and through pretty, modernly-furnished rooms to the drawing-room, where the family were assembled, awaiting the summons to dinner.

The contrast between the faces and figures I had seen in passing through the village, and those now before me, struck me forcibly. Putting out of consideration the effect of costume — consisting, on the one hand, of coarse garments of truly primitive simplicity, and on the other of flowing silks and muslins, and the latest fashions from Paris—the Zitvay family seemed to be of an entirely different type, although, as my hostess assured me during dinner, of the purest Hungarian blood. In fact, she seemed quite offended when I ventured to suggest that there might have been a slight Teutonic admixture somewhere. But the little urchins whom I had seen chasing the ducks, and the men and women who were taking their siesta in the open air, were rather below than above the middle height, and their piercing black eyes, aquiline noses, and dark complexions, had not the smallest resemblance to the soft blue eyes, with long curling lashes, and fair hair of the handsome family around me. And yet those black villagers were of the true Hungarian type, descendants of the ancient Huns, and the Wallachians among them were in many cases fairer.

Count Zitvay was at least twenty years older than his wife—a tall, fine, stately old gentleman, with singularly pleasant, courteous manners, and the bearing of a "grand seigneur," as indeed he was, being one of the richest men and largest landowners in the country, as well as of very ancient family.

The dinner, not being particularly in accordance with English notions of cookery, seemed to me to last for an interminable space of time, though served in the most correct European fashion; the only thing that rather shocked my notions of propriety being the occasional seizing of a bone with the fingers, the free use of a toothpick during the meal, and, at its close, the rinsing of the mouth into the finger-glasses. Dinner being over, we all adjourned with the ladies to the smoking-room, where, after shaking and kissing of hands, and reciprocal wishes for a good digestion, according to the time-honoured custom in these parts, the Countess presented each of the gentlemen with a little cup of black coffee and a tiny glass of liqueur. Cigars and Turkish pipes were produced, and we all proceeded to blow clouds which would have sent an English hostess into convulsions, but which had not the smallest effect on the amiable little lady of the house.

She and her daughters then plied me with questions as to my experiences in their land, and flattered themselves that they would show me something new on the morrow. All preparations having been completed, servants and household stuff having been sent in advance, and musicians secured, the vintage in the mountains, where Count Zitvay held large vineyards, was to begin the next day, and the hour for our departure was already fixed. We should have to leave early,

for we had some hours' journey to the mountains. Countess Erzsi (the eldest daughter), as she said this, looked as delighted as her little brothers and sisters, whose faces literally beamed with satisfaction.

"Only," said she, "don't be very difficult to please with your dinner, for I shall be cook."

"You?" said I, looking at the graceful little figure in trailing robes, and the tiny white hands.

"Yes," she replied; "because, you see, we can't take the cook, or else what would papa do? He stays at home."

"I should rather think he did," said her father, knocking the ashes out of his long pipe. "Take my advice, Mr. Owen, and stay at home with me. They will poison you with bad food and sour wine, deafen you with their execrable gipsy music, and then, when you are ill and miserable, and want nothing so much as rest, they will insist on your dancing till one in the morning, and afterwards give you such a bad bed that you are obliged to get out of it, and lie on the floor to get any sleep."

"Oh, papa! papa!" was the general chorus.

"Quite true," continued the Count; "and if that were only all! But they will drag you up and down the mountains all day long, and make you drive over horrible roads behind wretched, half-blind horses, lame on three legs, and fearful roarers."

"If papa would only come just once," said Erzsi, "especially this time."

"No, no!" returned her father. "I don't want to incapacitate myself for your wedding, my dear, and I prefer to stay at home."

"It is news to you, Mr. Owen, that our Erzsi is going to be married," said the Countess. And then she told me that the engagement was by this time some months old, and the wedding would take place next week at Pesth.

After congratulations, blushes, and information as to the bridegroom, the ladies left us with the promise of a summons to croquet in an hour; and the Count, his eldest son (a lad of seventeen), and I, were left to a long discussion on the merits of the different horses entered for the ensuing races at Pesth—their sires, dams, trainers, and jockeys; and then we went off to look at the stud.

II.

The sun was but just rising next morning, and the bells of the little Wallachian church in the village were pealing out as we began to assemble in the court and on the vine-covered terrace behind the house. The air was delicious, clear, and cool; a heavy dew, the first for many weeks, had fallen during the night, a fresh breeze had sprung up, and light, fleecy clouds were scudding across the sky.

Careering round and round the great grass-plot of the yard was a

little, strongly-built carriage, with two dapper little ponies, driven by their master and owner, Gyula, a little fellow of ten; and he drove remarkably well, too, held the reins lightly and firmly, and sat like a rock upon his high coachman's cushion, with his diminutive groom, no bigger than himself, beside him.

One by one the party came together, laden with wraps and umbrellas; the ladies in practical short dresses and thick boots, well adapted for mountain wear; their faces freshened by the morning air, and their eyes bright with the anticipation of some days of real rustic life and hearty fun, unrestrained by the rules of etiquette or the criticisms of fashionable friends.

We were a large and far from peaceful community, and it took some time to arrange us in the various vehicles. At last I found myself seated on a high mail phaeton, beside Dénés, the eldest son, and behind a pair of horses which fully deserved the eulogiums he had bestowed on them the night before.

Through the winding roads of the park, out at the gates, and then we were in the fields. The larks sang as they quivered above our heads in the clear light, as if the sunshine had found a voice; the acacias rustled in the soft breeze; and the cows tinkled the bells about their necks as they slowly raised their heads to look meditatively after us. As we scampered by we roused the wild duck among the bulrushes of the marsh, and scared scores of hares and wild birds from our path.

The roads certainly had not improved since the previous day, but the heat was less; and when at last we stopped at the village where fresh horses had been ordered, and where we were to rest during the greatest heat, and attack the provisions with which we were provided, my spirits had gained the elasticity which pervaded those of the whole party. We laughed, chatted, and cracked jokes with the careless ease and utter abandonment of oneself to the humour of the moment which characterises the Hungarian race, and causes it so strongly to resemble the French.

And so by and by we set off again, the roads becoming better and better as the blue outline of mountains in the distance became more distinct. On all the great plain through which we had passed, it would have been as difficult to find a fragment of stone upon the way as a diamond; but now the horses' feet rang hard upon the ground, and the clouds of dust which had so long accompanied us were left in the rear. The ground began to rise a little; far off on one side wound a silver thread that my companions declared to be the river Maros, and on the left rose the rugged outlines of a chain of hills whose sides were covered with vineyards, intermixed with groups of foliage and straggling villages, with here and there a tiny church. From the summits frowned the ruins of more than one ancient castle, famed in the long wars of Hungary with the powerful enemies who surrounded her.

Suddenly the horses shied, and half swerved from the road. Looking quickly to the left, we discovered the cause of their alarm in the person of a brown-skinned gipsy boy, tastefully arrayed in a sort of yellow tablecloth of small size and brilliant pattern, which he had tied round his neck, and suffered to hang down his back like the blanket of a red Indian. Other costume he had none, and his brothers and sisters, who followed him through an opening in the hedge, whence their miserable encampment was visible, seemed to consider even this species of garment superfluous. With confused cries and shouts they dashed after the carriages, holding out their bronzed and dirty hands for money, shaking back their tangled black hair, and whining, persuading, entreating and abusing, followed us without the slightest effort for at least a mile, dodging the whips, the wheels, and the horses' hoofs, and yet crowding round us like a swarm of flies. At last a shower of kreutzers freed us from their importunity.

And now we came nearer to our destination. The clouds in the west were growing brighter, and a rosy, golden haze lay over the hills, with deep dark shadows marking here and there the course of a mountain-stream among the rocks. The setting sun was glinting on the windows of the village, lighting up the heavy masses of the chestnut-trees, and pouring broad floods of yellow rays upon the vineyards that clothed the hills. Far off we could hear the sound of music; and coming nearer and nearer, winding down the steep paths, were the figures of the peasants bearing great baskets of ripe grapes upon their heads.

All at once, the carriage which had taken the lead for some time disappeared in a gateway between thick chestnut trees upon the right, a sudden burst of music filled the air, and a confused sound of many voices. We followed, and, entering a court, found ourselves between a vineyard on one side, and the whitewashed, vine-trellised arches of a little terrace which ran along the front of a small, one-storied house, on the other. On the steps, and crowding the arched openings, and peeping between the leaves, were numbers of active, constantly-moving figures; some alighting, others welcoming guests already arrived from the country round; servants hurrying to and fro with bags, shawls and packages; a row of black-bearded gipsies with violins, cymbals, and I know not what, in their hands, producing sounds that seemed to have electricity in them, so that I was not surprised to see Erzsi's light little figure, already enveloped in an enormous cooking apron, suddenly commence to keep time to the music. Then as suddenly she darted off, after making the announcement:

"Supper in half an hour, ladies and gentlemen. Not to be kept waiting."

"Only give us enough, Erzsi; that is all we ask," was shouted in reply. And then began confusion ten times confounded.

Everyone seized the wrong person's baggage, and tried to make off with it; the hostess welcomed the guests already arrived, and introduced us all by our wrong names; the children rushed into the vine-press, and had to be brought back; everybody spoke at the same time. And above all the noise, hurry, and confusion, were heard the wildly exciting strains of the gipsy band.

At last, after frantically rushing out of a ladies' bedroom, where I found myself in consequence of thoughtlessly following my hostess, and being subsequently rescued from the kitchen by little Gyula, who constituted himself my protector, I found myself in the sleeping-room designed for my use. It was, perhaps, rather smaller than bedrooms usually are, being exactly large enough to hold a sofa-bed and a washstand; but I had long ago been warned to expect no comfort at all during the vintage, as the house was several sizes too small for all who proposed to inhabit it. Thus I was agreeably surprised to find that I was to have a room to myself, though hardly larger than a good-sized packing-case.

The chief apartment of the house, occupying the centre of it, and being entered immediately from the front steps, was that devoted to the wine-press. It was like a huge barn, the floor of trodden and beaten earth, and the door large and wide, to facilitate the entrance of immense baskets of grapes, and to give ingress to the only light which the place afforded. Here, when the eye grew accustomed to the gloom, I discovered dark forms moving to and fro.

On two sides were large vessels, something like enormous barrels, or small wooden pulpits, and in each of these a man appeared to be dancing. Around him were others, who, from time to time, flung the grapes beneath the dancer's feet, or arranged mysterious taps and screws, which were to aid the flowing of the grape-juice into the great vats in the cellar below. I looked into the barrels, and saw that the dancers, or treaders, were stamping on the skins and stems of the grapes, piled at least a foot in thickness, and drained of their juice by the process, the fruit having been thrown in promiscuously as it was picked—only that, in one case, the grapes were white, and in the other purple.

The overseer, a sturdy Wallachian, with a fierce black moustache and ringlets, looked narrowly at the little streams of juice that ran from the taps, and when, at last, those from one barrel dwindled, and then came drop by drop and stopped, the treader swung himself to the ground, and, with shovels and wooden vessels, proceeded to empty it of the pressed grape-skins and stalks, and re-fill it with fresh fruit.

And here I must say my romantic delusions as to the "treading of the wine-press," and all the patriarchal institutions which surround it, vanished at once and for ever. I had had dim ideas of snowy garments dyed purple with the juice of the grape, and the delicate feet of girls treading the luscious fruit under the

shade of vine-clad trellises in the open air. In my imagination there were fountains of pure water washing away all stains and impurities, and long processions of men and maidens bearing the fruit on their heads, all decked with flowers, and singing and dancing to the sound of harps and flutes.

Had I not seen pictures to that effect, read poetical descriptions of it, and had not I always been encouraged by my childhood's instructors in this delusion? And now, behold, there were not any snowy garments at all: the Hungarians had on coarse shirts, and loose drawers tucked up above the knee; and I came to the conclusion that they had never seen any fountains of pure water, and wouldn't have known the use of them if they had. For there was a kind of griminess about them, burnt in by the sun, which seemed to indicate that they never washed either themselves or their clothes. In fact, they had a fine contempt for the ordinary rules of cleanliness. One black-eyed, purple-legged fellow, with the grape-juice just drying on his bare feet, seized a basket, and ran off down the steps and into the vineyard, and presently returning with a load of the fruit, shot it into the press, and, with all the dust and dirt of the road still clinging to his feet, mounted, and began to tread the grapes, and soon stood almost knee-deep in the liquor, which, having served him as a sort of foot-bath, was to be the drink, perhaps, of future generations of refined, fastidious palates. Having seen this I became melancholy, and preferred to leave the rest of the manipulations of earth's choicest nectar in obscurity.

The other apartments of the house were built around the wine-press. There was but one of tolerable size—that which was to serve as dining, drawing, and dancing-room. The rest were more like cells in a honeycomb: tiny bedrooms, and a kitchen; all, of course, upon the ground floor.

Presently, out darted the sprite in the big apron, with a copper saucepan in one hand and a large metal spoon in the other. She took her station upon the terrace, motioned the gipsy band to silence, and proceeded to sound the dinner-gong upon these instruments. All the doors of the honeycomb cells opened at once, and the inmates exhibited the most laudable devotion to punctuality by marching straight to the dining-room—decorated with green in our honour—and seating themselves in grave expectation. The cook herself (without her apron) soon appeared, a rather anxious expression upon her pretty face, which, however, gradually gave place to a beaming satisfaction, as she saw the appreciation of her skill, and the prompt vanishing of the various dishes of her fabrication. We drank to the health of the cook with enthusiasm.

During the repast the gipsies upon the terrace had not ceased playing. The door was half open, and we could see the men distinctly from where we sat. There were at least eight or nine of them, nearly all handsome men; dark complexioned, with regular

features, and perfect sets of gleaming white teeth. They looked quiet and civilised enough, and were dressed in the ordinary European costume, but nothing could ever convert their fierce, restless, gipsy eyes into the commonplace optics of ordinary musicians.

One man especially excited my attention, as being the leader. He played the first violin, and stood while the others sat. He was sometimes swaying to and fro with the melody which he played; drawing long, plaintive, sobbing sounds from his instrument, with his head on one side, and his eyes fixed in a sort of passionate melancholy upon some distant point. Then suddenly turning towards the band, one sweep of the fiddle-bow would change the entire strain into a joyous expression of rollicking delight. The measure became quicker and quicker, a smile would gradually dawn over the leader's face, and his eyes, black and watchful, would glance from one to another of his listeners; from the faces to the dishes on the table (tempting enough in all probability to a hungry gipsy), thence round the room, taking quick note of every article therein, and resting at last in a sort of respectful and hopeless admiration upon the prettiest girl.

But my hostess soon gave me a striking proof of their wonderful native talent. Going up to the leader of the band, she asked him to play a piece of music which had recently been composed. He said he did not know it, and indeed it was quite new, and no one had the notes.

That did not matter, the hostess just hummed over the air to him, and he began to play it on his violin. After hearing it twice he nodded, quite satisfied, and turned to his band. He played it through once, and the band, all watching his every movement—the jerk of his elbow, and the stamp of his foot—followed suit; first and second violins, violoncellos and cymbals, and the cymbalom, without a single jarring tone, joined in the concert, and in ten minutes the whole air, in perfect time and expression, was harmonized for the entire band.

I remarked what musicians they would make if trained.

"Yes," said the Countess, "but that is just the impossibility. They like their wild life, travelling about hither and thither; and with their wonderful talent they get their living with little difficulty, especially as they are dreadful thieves. But when one begins to teach them to play more from notes they rebel. They are lazy, deceitful, make excuses, and finally run away."

"Carrying with them, I suppose, any little trifles they can lay their hands on as remembrances?"

"Indeed, yes; they have a decided weakness for souvenirs, especially valuable ones, and for that reason, one never leaves them in a room alone. They do best in the open air."

III.

Supper being over, we went out upon the terrace, on which by this time the moon was shedding her silver light, glistening on the vine leaves, and casting sharp black shadows on the whitewashed walls.

Most of the guests dispersed themselves to continue their dessert in the vineyard, but I remained beside the gipsies, attracted by the curious shape of one of the instruments on which they played.

One of the men was seated before an empty barrel, in lieu, I supposed, of a table—and on it he had placed a flat wooden instrument, something like a shallow box, almost a yard in width, but rather less in length.

I supposed it to be a stringed instrument, until, coming nearer, I discovered that what I had taken for strings were long flat strips of glass, arranged in different lengths. In each hand he held little sticks, made something like the hammers in the interior of a piano, and with these he struck the glass keys. Yet to say he struck the keys gives an imperfect impression, for the hammers only trembled and quivered and danced in his fingers like the drops of a fountain falling into the basin below. One note was never long drawn out, but vibrated in never-ending repetition, particularly when the air played was slow and melancholy. This instrument is the cymbalom; and in every Hungarian melody there are notes which are only producible in perfection on just this instrument, although first-rate performers can execute a feeble imitation of its trembling tones upon the piano.

And now the dancing-room began to fill, the gipsies were installed in a corner, and polkas, waltzes and quadrilles began; but only to inspire the players and dancers with enthusiasm enough for the real business of the evening—the Csardas.

It must have been nearly nine o'clock, a late hour for so rural a spot, when the gipsies, after a silence of some minutes, began playing a slow, melancholy air, which I instantly recognised—from the peculiar rhythm—to be Hungarian. Pair by pair the dancers approached the band, until a dense ring was formed close to the music.

For a Csardas only two people are necessary, although, as in a waltz, it may be danced by hundreds. The gentleman holds the lady's waist by placing a hand on either side, while her hands rest on his shoulders, so that they front each other, and I am told that the rules of the dance compel them to look each other in the face. They began moving to and fro in slow time to a wild and melancholy air, the peculiarity of the movement being that the dancers every now and then interrupted their minuet by a sudden milkmaid's curtsey, for I can give no other name to the curious little bob they performed after every two steps.

This slow, quiet movement very much astonished me. I had

always heard the Csardas spoken of as something almost savage in its wildness, and these people might have been on their way to a funeral for aught of animation they evinced.

The instruments of the gipsies all seemed to be bewailing their fate in chorus; the cymbalom trembled with emotion, the face of the leader of the band was so long that I thought he was meditating an unusually appalling suicide.

But before I knew it, the music had changed and the fun grew fast and furious. The previous step, or something very like it, was continued, only sixteen times as fast, so that the dancers did nothing but bob up and down like corks on a stormy sea. They still held each other, and never moved from the place where they had taken their stand, for a Csardas must be danced on as small a space of ground as possible.

Now I understood that one must be a born Hungarian to dance the Csardas; for I caught sight of Erzsi, and by a slight movement was able to watch her evolutions; and I came to the conclusion that an Englishwoman of her rank would as soon think of dancing the Csardas, as it ought to be danced, as of dancing a ballet.

Her partner held her little waist on either side, and every now and then twisted or rolled her to and fro between his hands, and then changed or threw her from one arm to the other, her hands being meanwhile upon his shoulders, and she looking straight into his eyes with a pair of the loveliest orbs that ever bewildered a man's senses.

They had already been dancing at least for half an hour, and the bobbing up and down had lapsed into a kind of continual tremulous movement, but the excitement seemed to increase. Erzsi's partner held her with one hand, and waved his hand above his head with a shout, caught her in both hands, and whirled her wildly round and round, let her go, and putting his two hands to his head (with the gesture, as I thought, of a man going mad), executed a wonderful double shuffle with his feet, and then began to whirl round and round like a dervish, she doing the same, till with one accord they stopped, and seemed to fling themselves into each other's arms again.

Imagine these manœuvres executed continually by a dozen couples, all dancing so close to each other that they frequently touched, and, above all, so close to the gipsies that a stumble or a fall would have smashed in the cymbalom, or utterly exterminated the double bass. Imagine the fearful noise of eight or nine instruments in one comparatively small room; and, added to that, the stamping and shuffling of feet, the occasional shout of the dancers, and a lively conversation going on among the spectators—and then imagine the heat. The thinnest members of the community looked as if they had spent a month in a vapour bath; but the more robust appeared as though a watering cart had just gone over them, so damp and limp were they; even their very moustachios hung down at the corners, and gave them a ludicrously forlorn appearance.

I thought, when they got to this pitch, they must leave off or die. But no! They only shouted "Lassau!" (slowly), and then the slow movement began again, and men and maidens wiped their heated brows, indulged in a little gossip and a good deal of coquetting for five minutes, while that suicidal misery of a music was making me regret that ever I was born. Then the music changed, and they all went mad again. This continued for two mortal hours, and then we went to bed.

It was getting rather too warm for absolute comfort as our procession wound up the hills, the next morning, to the vineyards of Count Zitvay, which lay at a tolerable elevation. We had left our indefatigable gipsies behind us; but every now and then, as we stopped to rest under the grateful shade of the chestnuts, we heard the sounds of music above among the vines. When we at last reached the grape gatherers, the sound was explained, for there also were musicians, playing to animate the workers.

Here, at least, my romantic delusions were not dispelled. Black-eyed, laughing urchins ran up and down the slopes, barefooted, carrying wooden vessels filled with the fruit; the girls sang to the music as they plucked the grapes, and the gipsies seemed to enjoy themselves to their hearts' content. The vine-dressers and villagers in this part are almost exclusively Wallachians, speaking a dialect strongly resembling Italian; so much so, indeed, that I could almost manage to hold a conversation with a Wallachian, while unable to understand two words of Hungarian, which seems to have no likeness to any other language under the sun.

The Wallachians, unlike the Hungarians, do not permit their wives to work in the fields; and hence the far greater comfort visible in this part, in the houses, and in the costume of the women. They are a fine race, and as a natural consequence of their being less exposed to the weather, do not lose their beauty so soon as their Hungarian neighbours. Their costume is also most picturesque. On their black hair they wear a gaily coloured handkerchief, and over a white embroidered under garment with loose sleeves, they wear a bright shawl or kerchief, with rows of coins hung round the neck, representing, I believe, the dowry of the girls. Their bright-coloured skirts stand out all round, as though they wore a crinoline, and in many cases the embroidery of an under petticoat is allowed to be visible, over high scarlet leather boots, reaching to the knee. A Wallachian girl, with jet-black hair, regular, almost classical features, and splendid dark eyes, carrying a basket of grapes upon her head, is by no means an unpleasant spectacle.

After watching the grape gatherers for some time, we strolled slowly down the hill, laden with the spoils of the vine, which each one had gathered for his own special delectation. The carriages were waiting for us below, and after an hour's drive we found ourselves again on foot, mounting broad flights of broken and rocky

steps, under the beautiful avenue of trees which shaded the ascent to the church of Radua.

We were just about to enter the church, when a sound of distant voices joined in song struck upon our ear, and drawing back we saw flags waving in the air, and a long procession of pilgrims appearing and disappearing among the trees. We watched them entering the wonder-working church, slowly and solemnly, with uncovered heads; their song dying away as the rich notes of the organ pealed out: and then we followed.

The church was large, and of stone, and, for a wonder in Hungary, neither dirty, nor crowded with tinsel ornament; but the high mass lasted so long that I stole out and seated myself beneath the chestnut trees, watching their flickering light and shade upon the stones, and listening to the organ.

Within the last few months I had seen much of the Hungarians, had mingled with every class, and taken part in many occupations and amusements; and the wish I had cherished to know and understand the character of the nation had been to a certain extent satisfied.

But it was rather a melancholy satisfaction. I recognised the fiery, untameable spirit that I had expected; the patriotism, the kindly hospitality and grace of manner; and, added to this, talents which, if cultivated, would scarcely find their equal. Only a Russian can excel a Hungarian as a linguist, and the latter speaks every language with a charm and purity of accent which never ceased to astonish me.

There are draughtsmen and painters who, if born poor, might equal their famous compatriot Munkacsy; and to find a second Liszt might be far from difficult; but the indolence, the terrible laziness, the caprice and subjection of everything to the humour of the moment seem unconquerable. Methodical, earnest hard work, that sine quâ non of success, seems almost impossible to them. But they comfort themselves when their nation is compared with others, by the reflection that it is young in comparison with those of the great countries, which had already a state and government before the Huns had settled in these parts. Whether the individual finds much consolation in the national imperfection is a question which it difficult to answer.

Such were my reflections as I sat near the old church awaiting the return of my friends; reflections which did not preclude a feeling of lively gratitude for the generous and kindly hospitality and friendship which had been so frankly offered me.

Our visit to the castle was but short, for the hours of daylight were waning. After another day or two, passed very much in the manner I have described, we all took leave of the vintagers; and I, with earnest wishes for a future meeting, bade adieu to my kind hosts, and set my face towards the West.

HOW KENRICK MARRIED JULIET EUSTIS.

A STORY OF AMERICAN LIFE.

By Frances E. Wadleigh.

ONE of the scholars had been very inattentive and somewhat insubordinate; the unusual heat had, perhaps, soured her temper; so the weary governess had been compelled to detain her in the schoolroom during the short afternoon recess, and thereby punished herself more than she did the sullen girl.

The warm May sun streamed in at the long uncurtained windows, and brought into full relief the dusty floor and highly-varnished desks, the grimy blackboard at which a score of girls had recently been busy with chalk and string, the more or less shabby books carelessly thrust into their racks, and the "fagged" look on the young teacher's face.

"How tired you look, dear Miriam!" exclaimed Rhoda Crosby, a governess in the same school, as she languidly entered the room. "What a shame to have kept one of the girls in! I came to ask you to take a little walk with me, just round the block; we have plenty of time."

"Not to-day, thank you," returned Miriam, "though I should like some fresh air. Oh, Rhoda! don't you wish that we could go to the sea this vacation?" she added, earnestly.

Both Miriam and Rhoda had spent their childhood in a pretty little town on the Atlantic coast, not far from Boston, and after graduating at one of the Massachusetts normal schools, according to the American custom, had journeyed together to the inland town where they were now teaching.

Their salaries were not large, as both were young and inexperienced, and would not permit any long or expensive trips during the mid-summer vacation; so the two summers that they had been in Plainford they had contented themselves with three or four weeks in a farmhouse, where the highest attainable hill had an elevation of scarcely eight hundred feet.

"The sea! O—h, to hear the waves come thundering in after a storm! to see them break gently in a calm day! to drink in the pure air, that hasn't seen land since it left Ireland!" answered Rhoda.

"Ireland! Would not the south of France answer your purpose better?" laughed her companion.

"You are too literal!" rejoined Rhoda; adding, in a lower tone: "Do you never try to forget how much you, as a teacher, are supposed to know? Wouldn't it be a relief not to feel compelled to be always strictly accurate?"

"You are an odd girl, Rhoda," cried Miriam.

"So you will think when I disclose *my* plan for our summer vacation. I move that we spend July and August at the White Mountains, in New Hampshire, near Franconia."

"Perhaps you will also move that we inherit a fortune."

"So I would, if it would do any good," laughed Rhoda. "But recess is over; wait for me after school, and then I will tell you how we can go to the White Mountains without the fortune."

Late in July the guests at the Sahna House were thrown into violent excitement by a telegram which their host received. This telegram was as brief as most of its kind, yet it spoke volumes. It announced that a young Captain, who had covered himself with glory in a recent Indian assault, a member of the United States Senate, who was both rich and unmarried, two Governors of neighbouring States, and Mr. A., "the very handsomest man in New England," would arrive at the Sahna about noon, would dine there, and remain all night.

Of course the "leading" ladies convinced the landlord that he must give a grand dance that evening, and, his consent obtained, they resolved themselves into a committee of the whole on the important subject of dress. As if the valiant Captain or the wealthy Senator would pay any attention to such details!

No one was late for dinner that day. Promptly at two o'clock (for early dinners and substantial suppers were the rule there) the dining-room doors were thrown open, and mine host bowed his distinguished guests to the central table, while the undistinguished crowd rustled and bustled to their accustomed seats.

The young Captain and the elderly Senator glanced at the lady waiters and then glanced at one another, the latter exclaiming:

"By jove! Are they servants or guests?"

"Not exactly either," replied the landlord, who heard the remark. "Every one of these young ladies, whose pleasant duty it will be to serve your dinner, is a governess. You see, Mr. Brown—who keeps the Lone Elm Hotel, down at Xenia—had a number of young students as waiters last summer, and they were so satisfactory that I thought I'd try an improvement on his plan. So this spring I wrote to some friends and asked them if they knew of any school teachers who wanted two months in the mountains this year. I offered to give them four dollars a week, do all their washing, pay their railroad fare and see that they were treated as ladies while they were here. The result you see for yourself."

"I see a number of bright-faced, neatly-dressed girls, instead of the usual sombre array of African faces," said the Captain; "and I consider it very refreshing."

"And I see an exquisitely-appointed dinner table," added the Senator. "Look at those graceful ferns and nodding grasses in the

vases up and down the table; what ordinary waiter would think of utilising such simple adornments?"

"The lady who superintends laying the table is a teacher of geometry, and I am told that her intimate acquaintance with curves and angles is the reason that she never has a table-cloth crooked or a row of knives and forks all points of the compass."

"How do your guests treat them?"

"According to their several dispositions. Those who are really gentlefolk treat them as their equals—as many of them are; those who have more money than brains, or more fashion than pedigree, are either amusingly condescending or almost rude. But the girls laugh in their sleeves at the latter, and keep out of their way as much as possible."

"Some of these young ladies are, I presume, members of good amilies?"

"Oh, yes! more than one. We have the daughter of a really famous botanist, two nieces of distinguished divines, who count back to the *Mayflower*, one whose father was a geologist and member of a dozen literary societies in Germany, and yet another whose history is peculiar—that one in the blue dress, who is filling Governor Catlin's glass. She, Miss Thorndyke, is great-granddaughter of a Judge of the —— State Supreme Court, the granddaughter of a physician whose name is known all over our part of America, and the daughter of a clergyman. At her father's death, she, the eldest of six girls, went out into the world as a governess, and she was one of the first to accept my offer. When she first came she was thin, pale, and fagged out; but look at her now!"

"What a sensible thing these overworked teachers have done!" cried the Senator. "Here they get mental rest, bracing air, and a little money, while their over-proud companions are either shut up in the city or spending their scant savings in boarding at a farmhouse. You must introduce me to some of these ladies, so that I may have a little conversation with them. I admire their genuine independence."

And, though it has no connection with my story, I will just mention that the Senator ultimately married one of these governesses, to the dismay of all the belles who had dressed, danced, sung, smiled, and chattered for his especial delectation.

This had been Rhoda Crosby's plan.

At first Miriam Thorndyke had somewhat recoiled from it, but at last she thus reasoned: "I am tired and half ill; I absolutely need mountain or sea air; but at the end of this quarter, after paying my mother's rent and one or two small bills of my own, I shall possess the enormous sum of twenty dollars, which must last until October. At this hotel I shall get the change I need, and the work will not be arduous. As for the position—well, I am a lady, and so long as I conduct myself as a lady, what need I care whether any scorn me? And as for"—here a mental pause—"well, as for friends,

they will not be friends if they think less of me for doing a little honest work."

For "friends," reader, substitute "Ralph Kenrick."

If Kenrick had been a declared lover, if Miriam had been actually engaged to him, there would have been no such hesitancy on her part; she would have referred Rhoda's plan to him, and would have abided by his decision.

Mr. Kenrick had come to Plainford about the middle of the preceding winter, to recuperate after a long and weakening illness, and as the relatives with whom he then made it his home were well acquainted with Miriam, the invalid lawyer and the young schoolmistress soon became friends. They had many tastes in common, and as both were heart-whole it was not at all surprising that their friendship should appear to be ripening into love and prospective matrimony.

But weeks grew into months, and although Kenrick monopolised all Miriam's spare hours, and seemed to be jealous of even her girl friends, especially Rhoda, he did not speak the love he evidently felt. To Miriam this constant companionship, this protecting affection, was very sweet. That he loved her she could not doubt; every look and tone breathed it: so she enjoyed the present and rested content with the thought that when he saw fit to do so he would utter the decisive words that more than once had trembled on his tongue.

A few days before Rhoda suggested this trip to the White Mountains, Kenrick had left Plainford very suddenly. He sent a few lines to Miriam saying that he was obliged to go to the Pacific coast on important business, but hoped to see her again early in the autumn. What this business was no one, except perhaps his relatives, had any idea; and as these relatives had decidedly objected to his excessive devotion to Miriam, "only a poor governess, and there are so many wealthy girls in town, younger, prettier, and more attractive," they murmured, they vouchsafed her no explanation.

Judge then, if you can, of the multiplicity of sentiments which surged in Miriam's bosom when she saw Ralph Kenrick enter the dining-room of the Sahna House the day that the party of notables arrived. He was not travelling with them, but had accidentally come, with one or two friends, at the same time.

Fortunately it was not Miriam's duty to wait on him (she knew she could not have done that), as she was stationed at the table behind his chair; but she could see him, could observe that his long journey had vastly improved his appearance, and could hear his voice, and this was enough for the present.

He ate his dinner leisurely, and did not seem to be at all conscious that he was the cynosure of many bright eyes. Men of any age, but particularly young men, are decidedly in the minority at the American summer resorts; and the advent of a tall, good-looking, well-dressed, well-mannered man, with no visible female encumbrances, opens up a

mental vista of a thousand possibilities to all of the opposite sex. He *may* prove to be a good dancer, a musician, an expert at croquet or lawn tennis, or—the acme of good luck—he may be a wealthy bachelor in search of a wife. So placid was he that Miriam heard one young lady exclaim to her next neighbour:

"That unknown Adonis, Mrs. Tower's vis-à-vis, is certainly a married man! No one but a newly-made Benedict could so stolidly ignore Kitty Tower's big blue eyes and peachy cheeks and encouraging glances."

Miriam smiled as she listened.

But a moment later she ceased to smile, as she accidentally overheard a few words that Kenrick uttered.

"Didn't I tell you? I certainly intended to. Why, I married her, of course! Juliet Eustis was too charming in every way—and too rich—to be left to single blessedness."

"I don't quite understand how you managed it," interrupted his friend, in a tone of surprise. "Wasn't there another girl, Maude Somebody, that you ——"

"Miriam, not Maude," was Kenrick's suggestion. "Oh! there was no *engagement* there. I did prefer Miriam at first, but I changed my mind. I'll go more into detail by-and-by."

Kenrick's friend may have cared to hear the details, Miriam did not. Sick at heart she hurried away as soon as she had removed the plates and cups (collecting these had detained her just behind Kenrick, so that she was compelled to overhear his words), and never cast a glance in his direction.

Her idol was fallen, her love had been wasted, her confidence had been most ill bestowed, and her bright dreams for the future were suddenly converted into a hideous night-mare. He had "changed his mind," forsooth! And in so doing he had changed the current of her life, Miriam said to herself bitterly; had turned her light into darkness, her day into dawnless night.

"Miriam," whispered Rhoda to her, a few moments after she had overheard this unexpected news, "Mr. Kenrick is here. Have you seen him?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Did he see you?"

"I think not—I hope not."

"Surely you don't imagine that he would think less of you because you are *here?*"

"What if he does?" was the surprising answer.

Rhoda's eyes asked the explanation that her tongue hesitated about. Miriam continued:

"I wonder how many people in Plainford suspected that he had gone West to be married? Did you?"

"What! He—married—and not to"—Rhoda checked herself abruptly. "How did you hear of it?"

Miriam gave her all the information that she herself possessed, and added :

"Pray do not mention this. He seemed to wish it kept a secret, and if he chooses to go about as a bachelor it is not necessary for us to spoil his sport."

In the course of the afternoon Kenrick accidentally met Rhoda in one of the corridors, and was astonished at her frigid greeting, Regardless of his outstretched hand and cordial smile she walked swiftly past him, noticing his salutation only by a stately "Good-morning."

Kenrick was so nonplussed that he did not exhibit or really feel much surprise when he also met Miriam. At first the latter thought she would simply bow and pass on, but pride suggested a different course; she politely clasped his proffered hand, asked and replied to the usual commonplace questions regarding his and her present and past health, and then had to explain that she was not a guest but a servitor at the Sahna House.

"I presume you will return to your home by the first of September?" he asked.

"Yes; the schools re-open then, and we shall exchange a nominal servitude for a real one. I ask no harder taskmaster than a class of schoolgirls fresh from midsummer holidays."

"I hope to be in Plainford about the ninth or tenth of September."

"Ah! You do not go West again?"

"No. What is the matter, Miss Thorndyke?" he asked abruptly. "You do not seem like yourself."

"Whom do I resemble?"

"No one! You are as—as cool as if we were strangers, not old friends."

"Acquaintances of a few months, you mean. We never met until last winter."

"It is a beautiful evening. Will you not get your hat and take a little stroll with me?"

"Thank you, Mr. Kenrick, but I must beg to be excused."

"You are not busy now?"

"Oh, no; but all the same, I prefer to remain at home this evening."

"Have I offended you in any way?"

"Offended me! Oh, no!" she cried, with a little laugh that was not quite natural. In her effort to make her words sound careless she was unconsciously somewhat artificial. "But the truth is, Mr. Kenrick, that I accidentally overheard your confidential communication to your friend at the dinner table to-day, and, under existing circumstances, I think it best that you and I should break off our former pleasant friendship."

"Do you really mean that that need come between us?"

Miriam was now really offended.

"Most certainly," she answered. "Your question surprises me,

and the fact that you could even ask such a question confirms me in my decision. I want no man to call himself my friend who is not thoroughly open. I heard you caution your companion to keep your secret ——"

"It wasn't that I was ashamed of it, but I didn't want to have all the gossips busy with my name," he eagerly explained.

"You have heard me express my opinion on such matters before, I think."

"I have, but I thought you would make a difference in my favour. Oh, Miriam! surely you loved me a little."

"Mr. Kenrick, you are insolent!" cried Miriam. And, turning from him abruptly, she hastened down the corridor and was soon out of sight.

And when some of her Plainford friends asked her, that autumn, if she had ever regretted her summer at the Sahna House, she truthfully replied:

"By no means! On the contrary, I think it was one of the wisest things I ever did; the experience I gained while there was worth a great deal to me."

She did not consider it necessary to explain what that experience was, however. She kept her own counsel, even when one of Ralph Kenrick's cousins said:

"Ralph was at Sahna, I hear. Of course you saw him?"

"Oh, yes."

"And, doubtless, heard of his good fortune? He would hardly keep it a secret from *you*," a decided emphasis on this last word. "Was he not fortunate?"

"I hope it will prove a fortunate thing for him."

"Money is very handy to have in the house; and Ralph couldn't marry without it."

"Did you go to the country or to the sea this summer?" was Miriam's way of declining to discuss Ralph's matrimonial venture.

How does news travel? Miriam told no one, except Rhoda, what she had heard Ralph say to his friend, and Rhoda always declared that she had never breathed it to a single soul; yet before the autumn leaves had lost their glory of crimson and gold, scarlet, lemon, brown, and russet, it was generally understood in Plainford that young Kenrick had married that summer a girl with no end of money, and all his devotion to Miriam Thorndyke meant nothing.

Luckily Miriam did not know that a score of tongues were discussing her "disappointment"; she had not the least notion how often she was pitied because Kenrick had jilted her. It was quite enough to have bestowed her love on a worthless object; this half-contemptuous pity would have nearly maddened her had she been cognisant of it.

One beautiful afternoon, early in November, Miriam was walking home from school by an unusual and out-of-the-way route; the rich

glory of Indian summer had beguiled her into a long solitary stroll, and she thought of nothing less than of meeting with Ralph Kenrick. But a sudden turn in the suburban street, almost a country lane, brought these two face to face. Both were, for a moment, too much embarrassed to speak. Woman's quick wit, however, stood Miriam in good service, and she was the first to break the awkward silence.

"Mr. Kenrick! Is it really you?" she said.

"It is, indeed. You seem surprised to see me, but I told you I intended coming here this autumn."

"A flying visit?"

"I hardly know. It depends upon—upon circumstances. I *may* decide to settle here."

"How will your wife like our quiet town, after gay San Francisco?" Miriam was determined to allude to his wife just as if there had never been a probability that she might fill that place.

"My wife!"

"Yes," answered Miriam, surprised at his evident amazement. "You forget that *I* knew of her existence."

"Then you knew more than I ever did. I have no wife. What do you mean?"

"Is she dead?" asked Miriam, gently.

But her tenderness was wasted: Kenrick laughed heartily as he answered:

"She never existed! I have never been married. What made you suspect such a thing?"

"Mr. Kenrick, your jests are ill-timed, if you *are* jesting. Remember, I heard you tell your friend at the Sahna House that you had married Juliet Eustis."

Kenrick's puzzled face grew strangely luminant. Stopping suddenly in the unfrequented street he looked straight into Miriam's soft dark eyes, and said earnestly:

"Was that all that you heard?"

"Not quite, but it was enough."

"Pardon me, it was not. So that was why you were so cool to me? If you had heard the whole of my conversation that day, you would have heard that my hasty journey to San Francisco was on account of a play—a light, *very* light comedy—that I had written. A manager there made me a good offer for it, on condition that I would make a few alterations in it, and I preferred to discuss the changes with him by word of mouth."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I was ashamed to do so until I was sure the play would be successful. I remembered how severe you had always been upon men of genius or average ability who lent their pens to such work; how often you had expressed your contempt of a man who would write a sensational play or novel."

"Who is Juliet Eustis?"

"The heroine of my comedy. The hero was, at first, in love with Miriam Arnold (I wrote the play before I knew you, or I should never have taken that name), but she did not fall in love with him, so I married him to Juliet. Oh, Miriam! what a mean opinion you must have had of me. No wonder you said I insulted you if you thought I was a married man. No, Miriam! I am not married, and never shall be unless you will be my wife. Surely you must have known that I loved you?"

They were nearing the town, and Kenrick had to choose his words and guard his tones, but he was determined not to be misunderstood this time.

"You said," replied Miriam, with crimson cheeks and happy, downcast eyes, "that you *did* prefer Miriam but had changed your mind, so how was I to know any better?"

"Did I say that? I assure you it was not this Miriam of whom I spoke. Wait until you see the play—oh, by the way, it brought me some two thousand dollars, and I have made an engagement to write another at once, so now that I can afford to furnish a house I may venture to seek a wife. Miriam, I am not a rich man, but I can work for you; I can give you a comfortable home, a loving heart, and an untarnished name."

Miriam was obliged to defer her reply; a mutual friend met them at that very inopportune moment, and began to offer Kenrick her congratulations upon his marriage.

"Have you heard that absurd story?" he replied. "Thank you for your good wishes, though they are premature."

"Isn't he married, Miriam?" asked the incredulous friend.

"Not yet," was the unthinking answer.

"O—h, I see! It is a little too soon. Good afternoon," and the friend hastened away to spread the news that Kenrick was not married, but was engaged to Miriam.

"I didn't mean ——" began Miriam, with blushing cheeks.

"Don't say it, my darling!" he interrupted. "Say that you did mean all that your 'not yet' implied."

Her answer may be imagined. And in a few months she became his wife, although he had married Juliet Eustis, just as he told his friend when Miriam heard but half the story.

ERNA.

By the Author of "Our Lady of Tears."

DEEP blue eyes, large and tender and dreamy, a shining of golden hair, lips as exquisite as ever were sung by poet, and lending by their great beauty the crowning charm to an almost perfect face. This vision that brightened for me my life in the dim old manor-house might have been Psyche, lighted upon English ground in her search for Cupid, but a Psyche to whom Love, as yet, was nothing but a name.

I would have given life itself to have heard her in the last hour of it confess me dear to her, to have had one kiss from those perfect lips, as I lay dying, pressed on mine. But when I had half-hinted at my madness, half-looked it, she had shrunk from me; and snatching her hand from the clasp in which I prisoned it, had said to me very decidedly: "No, Gerald. If you would not have me remember how very distant our cousinship is, never dare speak of this to me again." And I never had, being in my love for her very much of a coward; but the eager hunger was always there. And she saw it, I think, and seemed sometimes half to mock at, sometimes to resent my love.

It was happiness—a happiness, though, that came strangely near to pain—to be thrown so much in her society as in the summer that followed her curt rejection of my suit. I had been flung in a wrestle for honours at Cambridge, and had reaped a fever instead, which had very nearly landed me where failure cannot disturb. When I had tottered a few feeble steps back from death's door into the way of life again, there came to me a great happiness. Erna and I had met until now only during the rare visits that her father paid to the pretty villa, west from London, where my mother had lived quietly during the ten years of her widowhood. They were distant cousins, and had been lovers long ago; or rather on his side there had been love, faintly responded to on hers; and at last she had broken off the engagement with a plea of relationship. He left her, and for many years they did not meet again; but I think he was never able either to forgive or to forget.

How is it when into our life there comes a bitterness like his—when we marry, and waking in the dead of night see not the face that lies on the marriage-pillow beside us, but other eyes that look on us tenderly and sweetly out of the darkness of the long ago? I put questions of this kind to myself many times, I well remember, in the summer when the happiness I speak of came to me—that time when her father's invitation to visit the old Devon manor-house being given and accepted, Erna and I lived week after week under the same grey roof, and I

gathered strength in drinking in the light that laughed on me from her eyes, and strolled with her in the Devon woods or floated with oar and sail amid the dream-like loveliness of the Dart.

She had the kindest, tenderest, gayest temper all the time that mine was still but the ghost of a life; but as I changed gradually to something more nearly resembling my old self, Erna began to change too, and was presently almost the same strange provoking girl I had known in the days when I laid my heart at her feet only to be trampled on. I would not repeat the folly; to be scorned once by any lips, however lovely, was enough.

We were alone in the garden one morning, and I was thinking this, and at the same time how rare was the beauty of her face, when she looked up and our eyes met. She did not blush, or turn from the glance that I was bending on her, but only smiled mockingly—a smile that passed next moment into a laugh, as wickedly provoking as herself. I was turning away, hurt, I scarcely knew why, when she stopped me with an imperious bidding.

"Gerald," she said, "if you care to come with me to the Winstanley room, I am just in the humour for telling you its legend. I can tell it nowhere but in the room itself."

"The haunted chamber?" I questioned, indolently. "I'm not in the humour, Erna, if you are; the morning's too bright to be spent anywhere but out of doors, and the story's certainly old enough to keep. I'm for staying here in this glorious old garden, and fancying it Eden, and you its Eve."

"Stay, then," she said, with a pout, and moved away.

I watched her passing farther and farther from me towards the house. Great roses were all about me, the air was faint with the odours of the honeysuckle, and overhead thick branches drooped caressingly, and only left here and there an opening for the burning sun to shine through. In a moment, it seemed to me, all would be grey and drooping; for in a moment more all that made the garden fair to me would have passed from it with her. She turned, however, as she reached the green, broken steps that led up to the terrace before the house, and seeing me rise and move towards her, hesitated a moment, and then came slowly back.

"So you are coming, after all," she said, ungraciously.

"Yes, I'm coming," I echoed. "And I'll listen patiently to anything you like to inflict on me, Erna, beginning with the ghost that walks at night in ——"

"Winstanley's ghost, you mean," she interrupted. "He does walk—he has been seen at least once in every generation of Heathcotts since the time of his master, Geoffrey Heathcott. You laugh at me," she continued, a flash of defiance in her great eyes, "but I tell you I *do* believe in him—in his haunting the house where his death was the cause of his master's."

"Why should he haunt it? It can't be a pleasure to him, I should

imagine, to haunt a place where, if you and your legends are to be trusted, his dying so inconveniently was the cause of Geoffrey Heathcott dying also. Does he hope that in the course of a few centuries his master's remains—they are hidden away somewhere, are they not? —may become unsubstantial enough for even a ghost to give them burial?"

"You dull, silly fellow! I know what old Winstanley would want to show to me, but I shudder at the very thought of passing a night in that horrible room they name after him."

"And what would he want to show you?" I asked.

"The secret of the secret chamber, to be sure. He would lead the way to that part of the house where it lies; and then, if I had courage enough to follow him, he would indicate to me in his ghostly pantomime how to enter it—show me where the spring is, and how it works. Then, if I had the still greater courage to look in, I should see—oh! I should see —" pressing her hands with a gesture of mimic terror before her eyes—"bones lying there—the bones of that gallant and noble gentleman that we Heathcotts are so proud to think was our ancestor."

I looked at her, uncertain as to how much of her speech was jest, how much earnest, puzzled to know whether she put faith in the family ghost, or not. "You would not dare sleep in the room they call Winstanley's?" I questioned. "Are you so superstitious, Erna, as to say that seriously?"

Erna darted at me her most indignant glance, by way of acknowledgment of my question. "Are you so great a hero yourself, Gerald, that you would care to sleep in it?" she asked.

"You forget," I said, lightly, "that I have not seen this chamber of horrors yet."

"See it now, then," she flashed out. "Come with me, and tell me if you would care to have it for your own while you stay here."

She ran off before I could answer; and I followed slowly to the house, and found her, after some minutes' search, returning from the housekeeper's private sanctum. "Now," she said, holding up a key that left deep stains of rust on her dainty fingers—"now for the haunted room!"

I was not thinking of it, or of the legend connected with it, as I followed her there. How could I think of a room and a legend centuries old with that fair young face beside me? Sweet face—grown something more matronly now than in the days when the world seemed to me a thing that, if I had it, might be laid at those feet for one kiss from those lips—I have but to close my eyes, and you are before me again, as bright and sunny as in the bright time of your girlhood. How sweetly the vision shines on me! I see the calm old woods of Devon, and rising from them the roof of a grey manor-house, its twin vanes shining redly in the morning sun; through the trees are caught glimpses of the windings of the Dart,

and the far-off blue of the sea, and wooded peak melting softly into peak, and fading in the haze of the distance as fades a dream.

I followed her through the inhabited part of the old house that summer's morning with little in my mind beyond the thought that she was fair, and that I loved her. We turned presently into a narrow, badly-lighted passage; and at the sight of ancient doors on either side of me other thoughts came into my mind—thoughts of those who had been this fair creature's ancestors. In these rooms they had lived and died; here the spirit of one of them—Geoffrey, the Cavalier Heathcott, who had fought as bravely as foolishly for the Stuart cause—was supposed sometimes to wander restlessly from midnight to cock-crow. I knew nothing more of the legend told of him than that his end had been strange and dreadful, and that his fate was in some way connected with that of his steward, Winstanley, whose name had been given to the room where Erna was now leading me.

"You care nothing for my legends, Gerald," she said, her voice breaking in suddenly on my thoughts. She had stopped before a door of especially uninviting appearance, and now unlocked it. "You might say that in any of the rooms below, or even here in the day-time; but —" beckoning me to enter—"would you dare repeat it at twelve at night, and alone in a room like this?"

"You don't think much of my nerves, I see, Erna," I answered, following her into the haunted room.

A strange, gloomy place it was, scantily furnished in the fashion of at least a century before, and having in one corner an antique bed, dating back, perhaps, to the time of Anne or George I. I found myself looking at this with an uncomfortable feeling that perhaps the ghostly steward, after his nightly walks through the old house, might lie down in it sometimes in preference to his grave. "Erna," I asked of the girl beside me, "do you say that mortals have quite given up occupying this room?"

"My grandfather once or twice slept here, or so I have heard," she answered. "He must have been a brave man—worthy of the Cavalier race he came from."

"Is the ghost so terrible a ghost, then, to encounter?"

"Terrible to a Heathcott," she said, seriously. "I know you will laugh at me, Gerald, and perhaps the fancy is a silly one, but I never come here without feeling that every word of the story they tell of the room must be true. Out of it, I am more of a sceptic about my ghosts."

"I'll hear the story before I laugh at you," I answered. I was more curious about the legend, standing in this dim old room, than I had been half an hour before, when resting at Erna's feet with the roses about us and the blue of the sky above, and finding in her eyes a blue between sky and violet, and in her cheek the rose's faintest, most exquisite blush.

She told me her story that fair summer's morning—told it half-laughingly, as was in her nature to do, and yet with something of earnestness breaking out more and more visibly, as the gloomy legend blackened to its close.

Geoffrey Heathcott, one of the most faithful and foolish adherents to a bad King and worthless cause, left England in despair soon after the terrible 30th of January, 1649; but returned next year to follow the fortunes of Prince Charles from Stirling to the fatal field of Worcester. He escaped with his life, and after shifting for many months from one place of concealment to another, ventured back, sometime in 1653, to Devon and Heathcott Manor, and lived there, undisturbed by the Protector's government, until, unhappily for himself, he became implicated in an abortive scheme for a rising in the West. He was seized, effected the same night a daring escape, and fled, with a party of Ironsides in fierce pursuit, to Heathcott House. The search that the Parliamentarians conducted there was at first without result; but General Harrison, their savage commander, was not a man to be easily baulked. He had the old steward of the family brought before him, and threatened him with instant death unless he would betray his master's hiding-place. The old man, still protesting his ignorance, was dragged to the chamber that had ever since been known by his name, and there a party of musketeers were told off to fire on him. Harrison had, however, secretly given orders only to load with powder. The volley killed Winstanley none the less: his frail hold of life was not to be thus rudely played with. When the soldiers lifted the old man from where he had fallen, they found him dead.

"And his ghost, of course, has ever since haunted the scene of his murder," I broke in, when Erna's legend had reached this point: "according to the foolish custom prevalent among ghosts of haunting the neighbourhoods that must be most disagreeable to them. But I don't see why this poor old spirit should be so very dreadful to a Heathcott."

"His master was never heard of afterwards," said Erna, slowly and solemnly.

"Well?"

"Don't you see, Gerald, that the old man's murderers were right, and that he was the only person whom Geoffrey Heathcott had trusted with the secret of his hiding-place? It is true the rumour at the time went that our ancestor had escaped to Spain, and died there; but I don't believe it. I believe that what the legend says of him is true."

"And what does the legend say of this mysterious Geoffrey?"

"It says that he had taken refuge in a hiding-place contrived in Elizabeth's time by his Catholic grandfather—a small cell that, unhappily for him, by an oversight of the architect, could only be opened from without, and so made a prisoner of anyone who was hidden there."

"So that," I said, catching at her meaning, "if the old steward were really his master's only confidant, the poor prisoner would in the present case have been buried alive."

Erna did not answer: she drew closer to me, and looked round her with a shudder. "Come away," she said, catching at my arm. "I feel as though if I stayed here longer the air would choke me. Let us get away from these frightful memories and this horrid room. I would not sleep here for the world—I should wake up with a start at midnight, and see the old steward standing at my bedside, and beckoning me to follow him, that he might show me where his master's bones are hidden."

"They are hidden, then, to this day?"

"So the legend says; but when I begged my father to have all this part of the old house pulled down that they may be found and buried, he only laughed at me But till they *are* found and buried, I feel that this will be a haunted room. The man who was killed here will never rest in his grave till he knows that his master has one too."

I laughed at her wild suggestion; and she turned indignantly from me, and flitted like a sunbeam from the quaint, dark chamber; leaving me to turn on its ghosts and its silence a key that grated eerily in the rusty lock, and to follow her at my leisure to the garden.

"Gerald," my entertainer said to me, curtly, that evening, after dinner, "you're a fool, and this little daughter of mine's a goose; and if the goose must needs tempt the fool into ghost-hunting, by raking up for his benefit some of the ridiculous old legends that are sure to cling about a tumble-down place like this, why, I don't know that I feel called upon to interfere. I'll put no more serious obstacle in your way than a promise of laughing at you when you catch a cold, instead of your ghost. You'll find the quarters you want to occupy rather damp, and there's more than a suspicion of rats about them; but try them by all means—try them," concluded Mr. Heathcott, with a yawn; "and if you can stand the damp and the rats for a night or two, let me know at the end of the time how you liked your bed-room."

I dreamed that night of having fallen asleep in the great old bed in the haunted room, and of waking with a start and a shiver to find a skeleton lying beside me. I had taken, I scarcely knew why, a violent aversion to that bed. "Luckily," I murmured to myself, as I woke in reality, and found the bright June sunlight shining through the venetians of my room, and falling on gaily-tinted wall-paper and the glittering brass of my bedstead, "I've given no pledge to sleep in it. It's enough, surely, to be about to occupy for a week a family vault, without one's also becoming the tenant of a hearse." And when I had, with the old gardener to help me, dragged the cumbrous, funereal thing into a smaller room adjoining the ghostly one, and my own smart French bedstead had been carried up to

replace it, I felt almost as though what I had done had exorcised the ghost.

I could not tell why, but that first night in Winstanley's room was the most restless that I spent there. There was a sickening atmosphere of death and decay about the place; and I tossed in my bed restlessly from side to side, and gasped as if the air I breathed would choke me. At last I got up, and dragging one of the heavy antique chairs before the nearer of the two old casements, flung it wide open to the June night, and sat there smoking. The two narcotics—night-air and tobacco—soothed me to sleep at last; and I woke some hours afterwards with an uncomfortable sense of having already realised my host's prediction, and of being about to carry down to breakfast a violent cold, and no tidings of the ghost.

Erna was in the garden, as her absence from the breakfast-room assured me. As for Mr. Heathcott, I doubt if he had seen the sun rise once in the last ten years, unless from the windows of his bedroom. I stole softly out into the open air, and down the tangled alleys of the dear old garden. I knew the corner that she would seek—where roses grew red and white among the white and yellow of the tangled honeysuckle, and here and there between the bushes bloomed fragrant masses of clove and pink, and the faint air in stealing past drooped heavy with the perfumed breath of flowers.

I stole on her softly, and the next moment had caught her in my arms, and my lips for a moment brushed her cheek.

She started from me—red as the roses she was gathering. "Mr. Osborne," she said, "how dare you!"

Then her eyes sought mine with an eager interest as she gently disengaged herself. "Oh, Gerald," she cried, "have you seen *him?*"

"Who? The Winstanley of the legend?" I questioned, laughing at her. "No, Erna; the ghost's as civil and unobtrusive a ghost as one could desire, and doesn't seem even inclined to haunt my dreams."

I remember, as if that dead year had been yesterday, how shy she was of me all that day, and how when we parted in the evening her hand rather touched mine than clasped it, and she bade me the coldest of "Good-nights." We met the next morning at the breakfast-table, and I laughed as I caught her eyes fixed on me for a moment with an eager, questioning gaze. "No, Erna," I said, "not yet."

"Not yet," I could have answered also on the third morning of my broken slumbers in that low-browed, shadowy room, where the rats and the wind between them made uncanny noises in the far-off corners, and one started broad awake in the dark hours after midnight, and looked and listened, with a vague fear lest the dead should also be awake. When one starts broad awake in a room reputed to

be haunted, and hears vague noises in the darkness, it is hard for the moment not to have faith in ghosts.

I had a dream on the fourth night of my imprisonment in that room that chilled me into an ague-fit of terror, and from which I woke shivering, and with a wild cry forcing itself from me in the greatness of my fear. I had dreamed of being alone with one long dead, and that the thing had touched me; and when I woke, trembling, and with the cold dew of my terror upon me, I was not in the room where I had fallen asleep, but in that to which, as it had seemed to me in my dream, the dead had led me.

I went down as haggard as a man might be whom such dreams had haunted, and paced the terrace before the old house, thinking feverishly of them. Birds sang in the trees around me; the morning air was cool to my hot forehead; and in the eastern sky there was lit a herald redness, that crimsoned momentarily into a more glorious proclamation of the advent of the sun. And even as the god of Day leapt up in all the brightness that only the eye of the eagle can look on from his burning couch of cloud, twin stars shone out on the morning also—the stars that lure man on to his bliss or his bale; and there danced and sparkled from under a shining of golden hair the light of a girl's bright eyes. Erna had risen as early as the sun, and but little later than myself; and stealing softly on me, her voice breathed as softly in my ear, while I stood there lost in gloomy musings and unconscious of her coming, the gay greeting: "Beau chevalier!"

I started, and turned almost fiercely. "Erna," I said, by way of excuse and explanation for my abruptness, "I took you for the moment for a continuation of my dreams."

"Your dreams, Gerald!" Her face flushed, her voice grew eager. "There are no dreams in Winstanley's room. Tell me—what have you seen?"

But I was in no mood at the moment for explanation, and I turned away without answering her question or satisfying her curiosity.

Early that afternoon, when the glory of the June day was at its brightest, we took our way through the dim and dusty passages of the uninhabited part of the old house, and, after awhile, stood silent and side by side in the room to which, if I might credit my dream, no earthly guide had led me.

It was a dim old chamber, darker and smaller than that called after the traditionary Winstanley, and in a far more hopeless state of disrepair. Once it had been an oratory, and the single and beautifully-shapen window had blazed with coloured glass, and from the carven woodwork of the walls there had looked down the faces of the twelve Apostles; but the glass was long since gone, and the Apostles presented now but a succession of indistinctly outlined lineaments, falling year by year into more irreparable decay. I went from one blurred mask to the other, vainly seeking to recognise that before which, as it

seemed to me in my dream, my ghostly guide had paused for a moment, and, pointing to it, had vanished from my sight. I stopped at last at one which, centuries before, had in all probability imaged forth the face of Peter, and, considering it attentively, felt some dim uncertainty of a recognition dawn upon me. "Erna," I said, "it was this."

We searched long for the secret that Erna persisted in believing lay hidden behind that bit of carven wood. The June day wore slowly out, afternoon was creeping into evening, but still, though the sun sank in the west, and the shadowy twilight began to lend an added dimness to the chamber, those small white fingers followed patiently every line of carving in the grim old panel and the grimmer face that frowned above it, and the bright eyes watched tirelessly for some clue as to where might lurk the spring that it was Erna's wild fancy lay somewhere hidden for her to press.

At last, tired of by turns aiding in and laughing at this wild quest, I menaced Erna that, unless she yielded to my often-repeated entreaty and abandoned it, I would leave her to seek for secret springs and hidden crypts alone. Then I turned towards the door, as if to carry out my threat.

She fled past me, rapid as a legendary fay, and, placing one hand upon the lock, with the other waved me back. "Gerald," she said, half laughing, and yet with a strange, sweet coaxing in her voice, "I want you to promise that as long as I choose to seek in this room for the secret I think it will give up to us, you will not leave me."

I had not meant to speak to her of my love. What was there in her words that they should thrill some subtle nerve within me, and send strange passion burning through my veins? I took her hand in mine—her slight girl's hand—and my eyes sought hers with a wild desire to read my destiny in them. "Erna," I said, "look up."

She bent her head still lower. I could see only the crimsoned cheek, and the golden head that drooped above it.

"You said once that if I ever dared to speak to you of love again, it would force you to remember that we were scarcely even cousins. I dare it now; I will be something more than a cousin to you, or we shall part. Erna, I say now, and more boldly than a year ago—I love you."

Still no answer; and the cheek flushed more and more, and the golden head drooped lower.

"I love you, Erna," I repeated, trying vainly to make her lift her face to mine.

Something in her silence and her blush emboldened me. I drew her gently to me, and—and . . . .

"The ghosts have given you to me, Erna," I said, releasing her—as she rather shrank from me, blushing, and hid her glowing

face against the carven wall from which the stony-visaged saints frowned grimly down on our betrothal kiss.

And I stretched out my hand and laid it lightly on hers, as it rested on a dark and mouldered thing, in which there yet lurked indistinct suggestions of the treachery of Judas. I felt the warm, soft hand tremble under mine, and struggle to escape me; and, tightening my clasp, there came next instant a frightened cry from Erna; then a rush into our faces of cold air, as, with a grating and sullen sound, the wall gave way an inch or two. And then, the spring refusing to act, closed heavily again, and left us standing there, looking wildly into each other's faces, alone with our wilder thoughts, and with the coming of the night.

We buried the bones that were found in that ghastly hiding-place, when a way was at last broken into it, in the old vault of the Heathcotts; and in the church beyond Erna stood with me next summer at the altar-rails, and exchanged with me the vows that made us man and wife. But when the time of roses came again, and a young life was born into our new home, far away from the Devon hills, her vow of obedience was, for the first time, broken. She insisted, in opposition to my wish, on naming our first-born Geoffrey.

And so Geoffrey, the stout cavalier of Marston and Worcester fights, sleeps his last sleep in the calm woods through which wind the clear waters of the Dart; and to the old manor-house, whose vanes rise glittering above those woods, come sometimes mother and child. And then, while the hot June sunlight pours through unglazed casement and shattered wall, and floods with its golden glory the place in which our ancestor's bones were found, Geoffrey, his young namesake, peers fearfully into that narrow crypt, and listens while, with his mother's hand clasped in his, the story of how that ancestor perished there is retold.

JOHN DONNE.

IN the year 1573, the year after all Christendom had rung with the fearful tidings of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, in an English Roman Catholic family of moderate social position and fairly competent means, a child was born, who one day was to show, both by word and deed, that the Protestant blood shed in that terrible night had not flowed in vain, whose hand was to be one of the strongest stretched out to pick up the torch of truth that had fallen from the martyr's dying grasp. It was many a year, however, before John Donne, for that was this child's name, began to give any sign of what his future story was to be. Brought up a Roman Catholic, throughout his youth he seems to have felt no depth of religious impression.

John Donne's scholastic education began early. He was sent to Hart Hall, Oxford, at the age of eleven. The notion of a child being thus made an inhabitant of grave old collegiate cloisters strikes our modern minds as strange and almost comical, but there was nothing strange or comic in such a circumstance to English men and women of the 16th century. Boys were then usually college students long before they had reached the threshold of earliest manhood, and Oxford and Cambridge were both quite ready to receive the most juvenile schoolboys into their reverent shadows.

When Donne had got his young foot once firmly planted on the first step of the ladder of learning, he was not slow in bounding up higher and higher. His lively fancy already began to show itself, and it made him quicker of perception than most boys of his age. He not only mastered and digested all his books, but he also, during the hours they were in his hand, breathed and moved in the very midst of the times of which they spoke. This made for him a delight in his studies such as few lads have ever known. His imagination—the imagination which, while his youth was still in its first green leaf, was to blossom into poetry—made for him the driest subject fresh and bright.

His relations were proud of their boy, as well they might be, and in order that he might enjoy new advantages they removed him at fourteen from Hart Hall, Oxford, to Trinity College, Cambridge; following in this also the custom of the times with regard to education, for then it was no uncommon thing for a lad to go from one university to another.

At Cambridge young Donne made quite as deep a mark for himself as he had done at Oxford, and as years went on the pinions of his genius strengthened, until they bore him into the regions of

original composition. His verse was not, however, yet known in print.

John Donne's education had begun so early that it was completed at seventeen, at which age he left Cambridge, and entered upon the study of the law. He made no very great way in this profession. Looking back at his story as we do now, we see at once that it was entirely unsuited to his mind and character; he was not formed to climb the hill of hard drudgery which leads to legal distinction. But though he never became a judge, or even a man of note in law, his intellectual power soon asserted itself in a way more congenial to it. Before he was twenty he published a volume of poems, which got quickly into brisk circulation, and were greatly admired in his day, though they are too full of over-strained conceits and too stiff to suit our modern taste. There is, however, so much of the fire and melody of true poetry in Donne's verse, that every age must grant him the title of a poet. And in after years his sermons, which are real prose poems set to the music of strains from above, give him a yet higher claim to the name.

The popularity of his poems soon made for Donne a foremost place in the first society, both of rank and literature, and before long the young man was launched right into the very midst of the gayest scenes of the London of that day. He had no strong, firm anchor of religious faith to hold by, for Roman Catholicism, in which he had been brought up, did not at all satisfy his keen, manly brain. His young head was intoxicated by the incense which rose around him on all sides, alike in courtly halls and in circles where wit flashed brightly. No family tie exercised a powerfully sanctifying, purifying influence over him. No wonder, then, that this chapter of John Donne's life is a story of downfall and shadow. The man's whole nature was a nature of fire, it shone in his verse, it glowed in his eyes; there was fire afterwards in his repentance, in his burning Christian love, in his preaching.

Thus it came to pass, that at the period of his life of which we are now speaking, the period before God's grace had reached his soul, he threw himself passionately into the whirlpool of wild worldly pleasure. His laugh was loud at midnight revel, his step hastened daily to scenes of sensuous enjoyment, the wings of his spirit were, for a time, completely clogged by the dust and mire of earth.

But there was soon to come for Donne a day of waking, a day of lifting up. His Master above had set His seal upon him, had appointed that there should be for him prepared a warfare, for him woven a crown; his heart and mind began to rebel against the tyranny which he had allowed sin to gain over him, and he at length saw that hitherto his life had been, in reality, nothing but a living death. By ceaseless study of scripture, by prayer and earnest thought, he made his way out of the errors of the Church of Rome, and did not rest until he had got firm hold of the cross, the cross on which his grasp

never relaxed till his life's battle was over. His repentance was sharp and bitter, but there was no unmanly weakness about it. He rose up from it, still to wear its sting as long as he stayed upon earth, but resolved to be and to do something for the Captain under whom he had now enlisted.

Donne now renounced formally the Church of Rome and declared himself, heart and soul and mind, a Protestant; but he did not, at present, enter the Church, for as yet he did not think himself worthy. Another new influence—an influence full of mild warmth and radiant light—began also, at this time, to shine upon Donne's life, and, under God, to have a gentle yet enduring power in leading him into the upward road.

There met him one day in general society a young girl. No jewels flashed around her, telling of high birth or wealth; no rare sun of beauty shone in her face; no stream of sparkling words flowed from her lips. Yet was there about her, as she spoke or moved, a halo which drew John Donne constantly towards her. They became intimate, and out of friendship blossomed love in both their hearts. Family circumstances caused the marriage to be a private one, but, before long, men beheld a young wife sitting at Donne's fireside.

From that day forward Donne's home life was one long floating down a sunny river. He was a man who never did things by halves, and he gave his wife his whole heart. She used the precious gift nobly and well; and, as a true Christian woman should, she never faltered in one great, beautiful effort to help her husband to be brave and strong for God. Many children came to make the melody between the pair more and more full of sweet-toned harmony, and doubtless this pure, calm, domestic life helped, in a great measure, the process of highest change which was going on for several years in John Donne's soul.

Donne's life, though he had mixed in such brilliant society, had not been one to roll up gold for him and his; therefore, when children grew more and more numerous around him, and there were several mouths to be filled, something very like poverty began to stare him in the face. He had, however, many influential friends; one of these was Lord Drury, who gave him and his family a home, for nearly a year, in his house. Others who loved and valued him tried to gain for him royal favour, by introducing him to the King himself. James I., who, with all his many faults and weaknesses, always appreciated real talent when it came in his way, was at once charmed with Donne, and delighted in having him near his person. The King and all his other powerful friends pressed him to become a clergyman, telling him that such was the path in life for which he was best suited, and predicting that it would quickly lead him and his family to prosperity. But though he longed to become, in a special way, his Lord's true soldier, longed thus to have a wider

field for working and fighting for Him, he still, for some time, held back; the memory of his past made him feel that his hand was unworthy to take up the Gospel sword.

At length, when he had reached his forty-second year, he resolved to take Holy Orders; he felt that, in truth, a war-cry from above was bidding him step forward and take his place in the ranks, and he would no longer delay. He was shy and diffident, at first, about mounting the pulpit; he was old to begin to preach, and he was quite unaware of the power which lay in him.

His first sermon was preached at Paddington, at that time a little country village. Thither he stole one Sunday morning, unknown to most of his friends, and with a mind but ill at ease. He soon found out, however, that he was in his right place at last. Glowing words and vivid similes came upon his lips as if they flowed from some inexhaustible fountain, and his very first sermon made a strong mark on the minds of his listeners. He continued thus to try his strength in country churches for some time, riding out, in the Sunday sunshine or through rain and wind, to some little rustic temple of the Lord, where earnest, weather-beaten faces of simple labouring men and women, and bright, eager eyes of rosy peasant girls and lads were raised reverently towards him, longing for the bread of life; until, at length, Christ's knight had proved sufficiently his armour. Then the large and important living of St. Dunstan was offered him, and knowing now that, with God's grace, he was quite ready to undertake such a charge, he accepted it.

At St. Dunstan's, Donne preached and worked bravely, until, before long, the favour of the King and his own striking merits advanced him to a yet higher position. The way in which James announced this preferment to Donne is amusing, and very characteristic of that King and his dealings with those for whom he had a cordial liking. Let us glance for a moment at it, for it is a picture out of the moving panorama of those times.

One morning, as the wife of the Vicar of St. Dunstan's is going briskly through her household review, she is thrown out of all matronly composure by news being brought her, by a breathless servant-maid, that one of the King's lackeys is at the vicarage door, asking to speak with her. The damsel adds much that is animated, though a trifle confused, about the splendours of the royal messenger's dress, but her mistress does not heed her; she is so full of wondering awe about what this envoy from royalty can be come for. Had her John committed some terrible breach of etiquette the last time he went to pay his respects to his Majesty? What could it mean? She hurries out, the keys at her girdle making a little tremulous tinkle as she goes. And she is greatly relieved to find that it is only an invitation for her husband to dine at the palace to-morrow. Her spirits rise quickly, for this is, in truth, an honour that Donne has never enjoyed before, and with proud importance in her face and air,

the little woman runs up-stairs to brush the Vicar's best doublet, and otherwise prepare his clothes for the grand occasion.

The hour for the Vicar of St. Dunstan's to start for the palace arrives, an early mid-day hour in those times, when royalty dined at noon and supped at sunset. Mistress Donne bids her husband bring her back a full and particular account of every dish on the princely table, for she has a pretty taste in cookery, and very possibly she may be able to imitate some of them. If truth must be told, Donne's heart beats a little faster than usual as he draws near the door of the palace. He certainly knew something of court life, but to sit down and eat with royalty is a new experience for him. The first part of the ordeal is quickly over; he has passed through the long suite of gilded ante-rooms, and the lines of richly liveried servants. Now, of course, he will be ushered into the grand banqueting-hall. But how is this? Instead of finding himself in a spacious apartment, glittering with gold and silver plate and filled with guests, he is left standing alone in a little shabbily-furnished room that seems to belong to the back-stairs part of the palace.

Donne waits in silent wonder as to what this may mean, and various uncomfortable doubts and conjectures rise up within him. At length the door opens, and no less a person appears than the King himself. The clergyman casts an uneasy glance at his Majesty's face, but there is no frown upon it; it is full of an indescribable, suppressed something that is very like a smile, that will try to make its own way out and gleam about the lips and sparkle in the eyes. At first the King chats about the most commonplace subjects. The Vicar represses the pangs of hunger, which are beginning to get rather importunate, as best he can, and answers respectfully, and as a subject should. At length James says, with what for a monarch is terribly like a knowing wink: "I doubt, Master Donne, that you are wanting your dinner, but I am going to offer you a dish that will serve for dinner, I think, and for supper both. What do you say to the deanery of St. Paul's?"

This was the way in which Donne became Dean of St. Paul's. An honourable position and considerable worldly prosperity now were his; there was no need any longer to fear the biting blast of poverty for those he loved; it seemed that he and his were standing in the midst of calmest brightness. But just then came the darkest cloud of sorrow that ever burst over his earthly life. There is a story which says that this trouble was foreshadowed to Donne in a strange, supernatural way; it is given by many of his biographers, so we will tell it here.

One night Donne was sitting up in the library of a friend in the country, with whom he was staying. He had been absent from home but a few days, and he had left his wife and children all well and happy when he took leave of them. He had become absorbed in some old folio, and he sat on till the whole of the rest of the house

was sunk in silence and sleep; no sound was audible save the wind rising, now and then, to breathe a long sigh, or the noise made by a falling cinder as it dropped from the dull red fire.

The student chanced to raise his eyes from his book and glance around the large room, which was all wrapped in dark shadows that folded themselves about the tall book-cases, and crept up and down the oak-panelled walls, and lay lurking in distant corners. There were only two bright spots, one made by the fitful glimmer of the fire-light round the hearth, the other by his lamp. Suddenly, amid the dimness at the further end of the library, he fancied he saw something moving. He looked and wondered, for he was certain no one had entered the room—besides, there was not a single inhabitant of the house up except himself; he looked and wondered, and then concluded it was a passing illusion.

But no, there it was again, a white object, glimmering out amid the dimness. A great awe fell upon him he could not stir or speak. Slowly, out from among the shadows a white-robed female form glided into the light of the lamp, until the yellow rays fell full upon it. Then the form turned its face towards him, and Donne was gazing into the eyes of his wife. She was very pale; her hair hung loosely round her; she held a dead child in her arms; she fixed on him one long, wistful look of love, and then she vanished. Next morning a messenger from London came hastening to the house where Donne was staying, with the sad tidings that Mistress Donne had died last night in giving birth to a dead child.

Thus Donne's home lost its sweetest music. He bore it, however, like a man and a Christian, and while he mourned her to the very end of his own earthly life, and never called another woman to fill her place, he brought up his seven motherless children well, and was unwearying in deeds of love and charity. There was no one in distress or sorrow near his cathedral who did not know something of the good Dean's sympathy and kindness, and the poor found in him a generous, ready friend.

Donne was perhaps one of the most eloquent men that ever stood in an English pulpit. The fire, the feeling, the passion, that rushed down in floods upon his audience, seem to have completely carried away his listeners; his sermons were often of the most immoderate length, but they would sit on spell-bound, now weeping, now clasping their hands, swayed by his irresistible power as trees by the wind. His genius as a poet no doubt had much to do with his success as a preacher; it bore him aloft into heights of inspired fancy, and clothed his thoughts in language of glowing splendour. When he had finished one sermon, he always immediately looked out a text for the next, and then carried it about in his head until he had built up a whole frame-work of thought and argument upon it. Thus he knew all his sermons by heart before he preached them.

Donne counted among his friends most of the men of intellect of

his time. As we look back at the deanery of St. Paul's, we hear re-echoing through it the deep roll of Ben Jonson's voice; we see entering it the cold, polished dignity of Bacon; we watch Donne in congenial communion with Bishop Henry King, the poet. All these forms are grouped around him, and, had we space for them, many more would crowd into the picture.

Donne wrote some beautiful and touching sacred poetry after he was a clergyman. One hymn of his own composition was a special favourite in St. Paul's, and was often sung by the choristers. His poetry before he entered the Church is occasionally stained by some degree of licence, but all that vanishes in his later verse.

Donne's health began to give way comparatively early. His often expressed wish was that he might die in the pulpit, and it was almost fulfilled. His last sermon was on the text, "In God are the issues of death," and men afterwards said that it was his own funeral sermon; his frame was bent, his voice hollow, but he never produced a more deep and lasting effect on his hearers.

Before his death he had, following a strange fancy of his own, his picture taken wrapped in his winding-sheet, standing on an urn, and from this picture a statue was moulded, and set up over his grave. When the church was burnt down, at the time of the great fire, this monument was the only thing saved; but it lay mislaid and neglected in a crypt under the new cathedral until it was found a few years ago, and given an honourable place, and now speaks to the London of to-day of her great poet-preacher.

ALICE KING.

IN THE MIST.

By Mary E. Penn, Author of "Old Vanderhaven's Will," &c.

I.

"YES, Winnie, I say it, and I mean it—you are a cruel coquette. You know that I love you more than life itself, and yet you take a pleasure in tormenting me."

"It is you who torment me with your jealous suspicions, Noel, and your temper is simply unbearable. I warn you that you may try me too far."

This fragment of dialogue reached my ears one autumn afternoon as I—the Vicar of Penravon—was returning home across the heights after a long round of parochial visits.

The speakers stood facing each other, on the dusty, sunburnt turf at the edge of the cliff, too much absorbed in their quarrel to notice my approach. Not that my presence would have greatly disconcerted them had they been aware of it. I had known both Winnifred Carlyon and Noel Tremaine from childhood; had christened them, and should probably have the pleasant task of marrying them, if all went well—though the course of their true love did not seem to be running very smoothly at this moment.

It must be admitted that there was some ground for their mutual reproaches. Tremaine, who was a clever young mining engineer, had the quick temper which often goes with a warm heart, and the very strength of his affection made him jealous and exacting. As for Winnifred, her best friends could not deny that she was somewhat wayward and capricious, though so thoroughly lovable withal that those little failings, which time would certainly correct, might well be forgiven. She was the orphan grand-daughter and spoilt darling of the wealthiest man for miles round Penravon—old Michael Carlyon, the shipowner—and was, besides, as pretty a girl as you would meet in a summer day; with a complexion like a May rose, and eyes of the wonderful blue that seems peculiar to Cornwall—the deep, limpid, changeful hue of the western sea; whilst she never smiled but to reveal a set of teeth dazzlingly white and even.

Noel's stalwart form, and handsome, vivacious, olive-tinted face, made a picturesque contrast to her delicate beauty: a better matched young couple could not have been found in the Duchy.

Just now, however, neither of my favourites appeared to advantage. The girl was flushed and defiant, her companion white with anger. Hitherto their disagreements had merely been the "renewing of love," but in this there appeared to be something more serious.

"What, quarrelling again!" I exclaimed, looking at them severely over my spectacles. "When will you two learn to agree?"

They started and turned, both looking rather guilty.

"Noel has insulted me, Mr. Glynn!" Winnie declared, hotly.

"I have not—unless truth is an insult," asserted Noel. "I said that you ——"

"There's no need to repeat it," interposed Winnie.

"Excuse me," he returned. "As you have appealed to Mr. Glynn, it is only fair he should know what has passed. I said it was scandalous that you should encourage other men's attentions when you are my betrothed wife."

Winnie laughed provokingly, though her fingers trembled as she trifled with a spray of heather at her breast. "Is no one else even to look at me without your permission?" she asked.

"No one shall make love to you if I know it," he answered between his teeth.

"And pray who has done so?"

Tremaine hesitated a moment. "Walter Borlace, for one," he said at length.

Winnifred raised her pretty brows in affected astonishment. "Walter Borlace! why—I have known him all my life. We are almost like brother and sister."

"'A little less than kin and more than kind,'" quoted Noel, with an angry laugh. "You know well enough that he is in love with you."

"I ——" Winnie began, then stopped short, colouring to her temples. "At any rate he has never told me so," she finished proudly.

"But you know it well enough, I repeat, and you encourage him."

"It is false!" she interrupted. "I have never encouraged him."

"It is *true*," returned Noel. "I have watched you, and I know it. I am not blind."

An angry retort rose to her lips, but she controlled herself.

"Yes, Noel, you *are* blind," she said, more gently. "You are blinded by jealousy, or you would know that, whatever my faults may be, I am not untrue or false-hearted. But you can think so if you choose," she concluded, raising her head proudly. "I will be indifferent to your opinion."

"You would not say that if you really cared for me," returned Noel, "but you don't. I have long thought your love is given elsewhere, and now I am sure of it."

Her lip quivered, but she said nothing, looking away from him across the calm, sun-lit sea. Noel gazed into her face as if he were trying to read her heart in it.

"Is it so?" he questioned, with fierce anxiety. "Have I lost your heart, Winnie?"

Her breath came quickly; she raised her eyes to his with a look

which ought to have convinced him to the contrary; but meeting his angry, suspicious gaze, her face froze again.

"You have not taken much trouble to keep it," was her reply.

He drew a quick breath and stepped back from her. "I see—it is as I thought," he muttered, with an expression in his eyes that almost marred the beauty of his face. "As such is the case," he resumed, speaking slowly and with difficulty, "I release you from your promise. I will not wed a woman whose heart is elsewhere. But listen"—he caught her wrist, bending his angry face close to hers—"if you will not be my wife you shall be no other man's. I will kill you first."

She drew back with a faint cry, turning suddenly pale.

"Tremaine, you forget yourself!" I interposed. "Your temper betrays you into conduct that you will blush for later. Threats and violence—for shame!" And, to do him justice, he looked ashamed already of his outburst.

"Come, come," I continued paternally, "you are both wrong. Temper on one side, pride on the other. Forgive and forget, both of you, and resolve that this shall be your last quarrel."

"That it certainly shall be," Winnie said quickly, but in a tone of resolution that was new to her. Her young face had a hard, resentful look that altered it strangely.

"You have given me my freedom," she continued, turning to Noel; "I accept it. Here is your ring. Henceforth you and I are strangers."

She held it out to him, and as he made no movement to take it, threw it at his feet, and went her way, with a firm step and erect figure, taking the road over the moor towards Borlace Court, as the old-fashioned manor-house was called.

Tremaine mechanically picked up the ring, and stood, looking after her, with a blank, incredulous expression, as if he hardly realised what had happened. The tempest of passion had passed as quickly as it rose, leaving pain and remorse behind.

"Do you think she is in earnest, Mr. Glynn?" he asked at last, in a tone of dismay.

"It looks very like it," I answered dryly.

"You think she really intends to take me at my word, and —— But, good heavens, I did not mean it! I was so maddened with jealousy I hardly knew what I said."

"You must have been mad indeed to believe for a moment that Walter Borlace had taken your place in her heart," I said.

"She did not contradict me," he muttered.

"Pride sealed her lips, but her face spoke for her, if you had had eyes to see."

He was silent a moment, looking down. His colour came and went; his face was troubled and remorseful.

"I have acted like a fool!" he burst out at last. "I know that

she is true at heart, in spite of her little coquetries, and I have driven her from me—perhaps for ever! What shall I do? Do you think she will forgive me? I will ask her pardon on my knees ——"

"I hope you will do nothing so ridiculous," I interrupted. "It will be better policy to keep away for a few days, until she has had time to think it over, and then ——"

"And then, perhaps, I shall find that she has engaged herself to that fellow"—he nodded towards Borlace woods—"in a fit of pique. No; I will not eat or sleep till my ring is on her finger again. She is gone to the Court to tea; I shall wait here till she returns, and it will be strange if I can't win her pardon for a few hasty words. She knows that my temper, and not my heart, was to blame."

"You must learn to control that temper of yours," I said gravely, as we shook hands, "or I fear it will lead you into terrible trouble some day."

I little thought when I uttered that prediction how soon it was destined to be fulfilled.

He turned from me without replying, and I left him standing with folded arms on Penravon Cliff, while I went on my way home, pondering, with a bachelor's amused perplexity, on the strange inconsistencies of "the passion called love."

Five minutes' walk brought me to the Vicarage—a low, square house of grey stone, facing the sea, while its back windows looked out over the broad purple moor. Between the house and the cliffs stood the church, a quaint, weather-stained granite building, said to be of sixteenth century architecture. In stormy weather its walls were ofter wet with spray, and in its crowded graveyard many a humble stone bore witness to the perils of those that "go down to the sea in ships."

The most striking object in the view from my windows was the ancient Martello Tower on Penravon Cliff, locally known as the "Smugglers' Keep." The vaults beneath had once been used as a storing-place for contraband goods, and it was said that a subterranean passage connected them with the beach, but the entrance in the face of the cliff had probably long ago been blocked up by falls of rock. These slips were of constant occurrence, sometimes only consisting of loose stones and sand; but often great masses of rock, detached from the overhanging edge, went crashing and thundering to the beach.

The narrow footpath, passing the churchyard gate, wound along Penravon Cliff, and dipped abruptly into the wooded hollow which sheltered the village—one of the most picturesque on the Cornish coast. Its steep, zigzag main street went straggling down to the water's edge, where it terminated in a little jetty of rough boulders and dark beams dripping with seaweed. The houses were, for the most part, low stone cottages, with deep doorways and slated roofs, and gardens where myrtle and fuchsia flourished luxuriantly; but on the wooded slope above were dotted not a few white-walled villas, among which

the shipowner's house, substantial and sturdy-looking like himself, showed conspicuously.

A couple of hours later, having dined and rested, I strolled out through my garden into the humble "God's acre" which adjoined it, and sat down on the low stone wall, under a twisted old thorn-tree. The glory of the evening had departed, and twilight was gathering over land and sea—a chill grey twilight, with something melancholy in its utter stillness. The sun had set in a hazy horizon, and now the cold sea mist was drifting inland like a ghostly veil, gradually blotting out the familiar outlines of the scene.

As I sat, smoking meditatively, and watching old Dan Tregallas, the sexton, who was digging a grave not far off, two figures approached along the path, looming suddenly out of the mist—Winnifred Carlyon and Walter Borlace.

The latter was a slight, rather effeminate-looking young fellow of two or three-and-twenty, with pale grey eyes and thin lips—as great a contrast to Tremaine in person as in character. There had always been a latent antagonism between the two men, which only needed a pretext to break into open enmity.

His expression, as he looked down into his companion's face, left little doubt as to his feelings for her. But Winnie did not seem to observe it; her eyes were bent on the ground with a downcast, troubled look. Neither of them noticed me, though they passed so closely to where I sat that I could not help overhearing a part of their conversation.

"Why do you look so sorrowful?" were the first words I heard, in Walter Borlace's soft, drawling voice. It seems to me that you ought to congratulate yourself on your escape. What chance of happiness would you have had with Tremaine—a violent, dangerous fellow, who ——"

"He is nothing of the sort," she interrupted quickly. "You were always prejudiced against him, and for no earthly reason."

"And yet you told me just now that he had threatened your life!" exclaimed Borlace.

"He said some wild words in the heat of passion," replied Winnie; "but of course they meant nothing. I am very sorry I repeated them. I was the most to blame; I ought not to have provoked him to anger."

He glanced at her with an unpleasant smile. "I see—it is the old story. You have quarrelled just for the pleasure of making it up again."

She shook her head. "Not this time; it has gone too far," she said gravely.

"Are you sure of that?" he asked, taking her hand, and speaking for once without affectation. "Are you really free? Then, Winnie, I may say to you at last what has been on my lips many a time before, though you would never let me speak. I think you know what it is. You must know that I ——"

Winnie coloured, and drew her hand away.

"Walter, please say no more," she interrupted. "I am not in the mood to listen just now."

His thin lips tightened. "Will you ever be in the mood?" he questioned.

"Some other time I may be—I don't know; but certainly not now." She put out her hand as she spoke. "Don't trouble to come any further," she added abruptly. "Good-bye."

"Are you offended with me?" he asked, bending to look into her face.

"No, but—but I would rather be alone."

"How white you are," he exclaimed, as they shook hands; "and you are shivering. Are you cold?"

She laughed uneasily. "No, it was only a nervous tremor. Someone is walking on my grave, as the country people say."

He lingered a moment, twisting his neat little blonde moustache as he looked after her; then, with a slight shrug, turned and walked slowly away in the opposite direction.

I watched the girl's retreating figure till the mist hid it from view, wondering if Noel was still waiting on Penravon Cliff, and whether there would be another angry scene when they met.

As the thought crossed my mind I was conscious of a strange, uncomfortable feeling, such as I have experienced sometimes in a troubled dream; a vague dread; a presentiment of some impending calamity which I was powerless to avert. I tried to shake it off, but it clung to me, assuming every moment a more definite shape.

At length, yielding to an impulse I could not understand, I swung myself over the low wall, and followed her.

The mist was now so dense that I was obliged to proceed cautiously lest I should stray from the path, which at some points is dangerously near to the edge of the precipitous cliff.

I had passed the spot where I parted from Tremaine, and was approaching the old tower, when a confused sound of voices reached me; voices I recognised, though the speakers were as yet invisible.

"Winnie, don't madden me! You know that I didn't mean what I said. Take back the ring."

"After you have insulted and threatened me? Never! No, you shall not force it on me; let go my hand—how dare you!"

"I dare anything rather than lose you."

"This is not the way to win me back. Let go my hand—you hurt me! Ah, take care, Noel! you will ——"

The words broke off in a scream—a cry so wild and terrible that it went through my nerves like an electric shock. In another moment I was on the spot.

Tremaine was standing, rigid and motionless as a figure carved in stone, on the extreme verge of the cliff, gazing blankly into the depth below, where there was nothing to be seen but the drifting mist;

nothing to be heard but the wash of the incoming waves upon the rocks.

Where was Winnifred?

When I put the question in a faltering voice, and laid my hand upon his arm, he slowly turned his head and looked at me.

I trust I may never again see on a human face the expression his wore at that moment—the speechless horror and despair which seemed to petrify every feature. He tried to answer, but no sound came from his white lips. He mutely pointed down to the beach.

"Great heaven!" I gasped, "you do not mean that you—that she has fallen over?" He inclined his head.

"We were standing on the path close to the edge," he began, in a low hoarse whisper. "I tried to force the ring upon her; she resisted and struggled to get her hand away. I loosed it suddenly—so suddenly that she staggered backwards, and—and before I could prevent it, she ——"

His voice broke; a shudder ran through him from head to foot. He threw up his hands with a wild despairing gesture.

"I have killed her—I that would have died for her! I have killed her—my love, my darling! Well, it is but a step to join her."

In another moment he would, in the frenzy of despair and remorse, have thrown himself over the cliff, but I seized his arm and dragged him back by main force.

As I did so, young Borlace came hurrying up, out of breath.

"What has happened?" he panted. "I heard a cry ——"

"There has been a terrible accident," I began, and in a few hurried words told him all.

He stared at me with an expression of incredulous horror, then turned his eyes on Noel Tremaine. "An accident?" he repeated slowly. "*Was* it an accident?"

Tremaine started, and raised his head. Their eyes met, and for a moment they looked at each other as if under a spell.

"Good heavens—you cannot believe that I intended ——" Noel began, but reading the other's dark suspicion only too plainly in his face, he left the sentence unfinished, and turned abruptly away.

"That is a shameful insinuation," I cried warmly. "You know that Tremaine loved her too well to ——"

"I know that he threatened her life this afternoon," interrupted Borlace; "let him deny it if he can."

Noel looked round. His face had frozen into a strange quietude.

"I do not deny it. It is true."

"And a moment ago I heard you say that you had killed her."

"But not intentionally!" I exclaimed; "it was an accident. Tremaine—speak! defend yourself from this shocking accusation. Do not let it be supposed that you are—a murderer!"

He shuddered, and covered his eyes with his hand. "I feel like

one," he groaned. "But for me this would never have happened. Her death lies at my door ——"

"We do not yet know that she is dead," I returned, hastily. "While we are loitering here she may be lying insensible on the beach."

The suggestion—improbable as I felt it to be—had the effect of rousing him from his despairing apathy. The words had hardly left my lips when he turned from us, and hurried away, soon disappearing in the mist.

"If she has survived such a fall it is little short of a miracle," Walter Borlace remarked, as we followed.

"And you forget, Mr. Glynn, that the tide is at the flood. It will take us more than an hour to reach Penravon Rocks; by that time the waves will have carried her away."

I made no answer; I knew only too well that he was right, and my heart sank as I thought of all the misery that was to come.

The nearest way to the beach was through the village, where Noel had arrived before us. The news spread like wild-fire through the place (though none dared to carry it to Michael Carlyon), and half the population turned out to accompany us. There was some delay while the boats were put out, and lanterns and torches provided, and it seemed hours to our impatience before we reached the spot.

A light breeze had sprung up, dispersing the mist, and the moon and stars looked forth as serenely as if there were no death in the world, no sin or sorrow. The pale, pure light gleamed on Penravon Rocks, from which the tide had retreated, leaving them wet and bare; sparkled on the shallow pools between the boulders, showed every crevice and projection of the rugged cliff—but it did not show us the figure we hoped, yet dreaded, to see.

Noticing that there had been a recent fall of turf and soil from the edge of the cliff, some of the men set to work to remove the débris, while the others gathered round, hardly daring to think what piteous sight might be revealed. But they found nothing.

Hoping against hope we continued the search for hours, sometimes mistaking a patch of moonlight for a fair dead face, or a floating tangle of sea-weed for "a drowned maiden's hair,"—all in vain. Of Winnifred Carlyon, dead or living, there was no trace.

At length we prepared to return, but without Noel, who refused to leave the spot.

"I shall find her yet—something tells me that I shall," he muttered, casting a haggard glance round him. "Go—all the rest of you; I would rather be alone."

Walter Borlace gave him a curious look from his pale grey eyes, and seemed about to speak, but checked himself, and followed the others in silence.

"Who'll break the news to old Carlyon?" the men whispered among themselves, glancing furtively at me.

I knew that the sorrowful task would be mine, though I would have given much to avoid it. I dared not think of the grief and desolation the tidings would bring into the home which the sweet girl's presence had brightened.

II.

NOTHING travels so swiftly as ill-tidings, and nothing is more infectious than suspicion. Before another day had dawned the tragedy was known far and wide, and as the news spread, a vague shadow of doubt and distrust gathered round Noel's name. No accusation had yet been uttered, but on every side I heard the echo of Walter Borlace's doubting question—

"*Was* it an accident?"

Tremaine himself seemed unconscious of the whispered suspicion; unconscious of everything except his despair. All day long he was wandering on the heights, or by the margin of the "cruel, crawling foam," as if in the wild hope that the waves would give back what they had taken.

There had been a sudden change in the weather. A strong north-westerly gale was rising, and as I sat in my study at the vicarage that evening I felt the sturdy old house vibrate beneath the gust, while the rain beat against the panes as if it would drive them in. I was endeavouring, not very successfully, to concentrate my mind on the sermon I had begun when there was a tap at the door, and old Dan Tregellas, the sexton, entered, looking scared and startled.

"What is it?" I enquired. "You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"Something like one, Sir. Coming up from the village just now I met young Tremaine, and it gave me quite a turn."

"Where was he?"

"On Penravon Cliff, just about where the accident happened. He was walking fast, talking to himself. I spoke to him, but he didn't hear me; didn't even see me, though he passed close to me. He was staring straight before him like a sleep-walker, and his face was as white as this"—laying his finger on my writing-paper. "I doubt his mind's giving way, sir, and he'll do himself a mischief if he's not prevented."

I threw down my pen and rose.

"In which direction was he going?"

"Straight towards the Keep."

I drew aside the curtain and looked out. Dusk was deepening into night; a wild stormy night of hurrying clouds and driving rain. Enough light remained to show me the massive form of the tower, standing sentinel above the angry sea.

"Surely he doesn't mean to spend the night in that dismal place?" old Dan muttered at my elbow.

"He must not be allowed to do so. Fetch me a lantern and help me on with my overcoat; I shall go after him at once."

Five minutes later I sallied forth into the rain and darkness.

The moment I emerged from the house the wind swooped down upon me with a rush that nearly took me off my feet, half blinding me as it drove the sharp sleet into my eyes. I struggled on, however, fighting my way along, with bent head, and at length, out of breath and dripping with rain, I reached the tower.

In the days when it was used for contraband purposes, the lower part of the building had been roughly restored; the breaches in the wall stopped up, the windows barred across, and a massive door added, which now hung awry on its rusty hinges. The place had an uncanny sort of reputation in the neighbourhood, and nothing would have induced the superstitious fishermen to enter it after dark.

I pushed open the door and looked in, holding the lantern above my head. Its light showed me the figure of Noel Tremaine, standing motionless in the middle of the floor, as if he had stopped short in the act of crossing it. His face was turned towards the door, but he did not appear to see me. He stood in a listening attitude, his lips apart, his eyes fixed and dilated, every line of his face expressing strained and anxious attention.

What was it he heard? No sound reached my own ears but the roar of the wind and the murmur of the sea. A vague, half-superstitious fear crept over me as I watched him, but I shook it off and entered, closing the door loudly to attract his attention. But though the sound echoed through the place, it did not break the strange spell that held him. It was not until I touched his arm that he seemed conscious of my presence. Then he started violently, and looked at me with a wild, haggard stare, but expressed no surprise at my sudden appearance, and for a moment seemed hardly to recognise me. At length he drew a deep breath, as if waking from a dream, and laid his hand on my wrist.

"Do you hear it?" he asked, in a breathless whisper.

"I hear nothing but the wind and the sea."

"Not that—the sound is within the tower. Hark!"

I listened intently a moment, then shook my head. "It was the cry of a sea-gull."

"I tell you it is here, close to us, seeming to come from the ground beneath our feet," he persisted excitedly.

"What is the sound?"

His answer fairly took my breath away.

"Winnie's voice."

I looked at him compassionately. "You are dreaming, Noel! grief and excitement have unnerved you. Come out of this gloomy place; come home with me, and ——"

He shook his head impatiently.

"No, I dare not leave this spot. Something—an attraction I can't

explain—drew me to it in spite of myself, and just now, before you came, I thought I heard —— There again !" he broke off, seizing my shoulder. "Good heavens ! is it possible you don't hear it too ?"

Was I infected by his delusion, or did I indeed hear a faint muffled cry, seeming, as he had said, to come from the ground beneath our feet ?

He had watched my face, and his own lighted up with a wild triumph.

"Do you believe me now, or are we both dreaming ?" he cried ; then, relinquishing my arm, he threw himself on the floor, beating the stones as if he would have torn them up with his bare hands.

"Winnie—Winnie ! Speak to me—where are you ?"

It was no delusion this time : no trick of excited fancy. A voice—not the "wail of a soul in pain," but the voice of a living woman, answered : "I am here, in the vault ! Help—come to me !"

Noel sprang to his feet, with a cry that rang through the place. "Ah, I understand ! Dolt that I was not to think of it before ! Mr. Glynn—the subterranean passage ——"

I started, and looked back at him with a face as excited as his own. "But—but how could she ——" I began.

"I don't know. It is all mystery at present," he interrupted ; "but one thing is certain. By some strange chance she must have discovered the opening in the cliff, and made her way to the vault. The entrance is somewhere in the floor. Give me the lantern—quick !"

I handed it to him, and we anxiously examined the pavement, which was of square stone slabs, worn and uneven with age. In one of them, which appeared newer than the rest, was embedded a rusty iron ring. My companion pointed to it without a word, and set down the light.

The stone had become firmly fixed in its position, and it required the utmost exertion of our united strength to raise it. When, at length, we succeeded in removing it, a breath of damp cold air, charged with an earthy odour, came rushing up from the vault beneath.

Noel bent over the opening, gazing down anxiously as he swung the lantern to and fro. Its rays fell on what looked like a heap of light drapery, huddled together at the further end of the vault.

"She is there!" he breathed ; "but—but she does not speak or stir. Suppose—suppose we are too late ?"

I took the lantern while he let himself drop into the vault, then handed it down to him, and watched him as he approached the motionless figure.

He bent over it, raised the drooping head, and turned the white face to the light. Then, with an inarticulate sound of mingled pain and rapture, he lifted the slight form and bore it towards the opening where I was waiting to receive it.

We took off our coats and laid her down upon them. I supported her head on my knee while he tenderly chafed her hands.

"Are we too late?" he faltered, looking up at me with a face hardly less white than hers.

"No, she has only fainted. Look, she is reviving already."

Even as I spoke she stirred uneasily, drew a deep breath, and unclosed her eyes. They wandered round the unfamiliar place, then rested on her lover, who knelt at her side, watching her with breathless anxiety.

The change in her face was something to remember. Light, life and colour rushed back to it in a sudden tide of joy that transfigured every feature.

"Noel, Noel!"

The next moment his strong arms were round her, and his lips pressed to hers.

"My love—my darling!" he whispered between his passionate kisses. "How can I thank heaven enough for its mercy in giving you back to me almost from the grave!"

"It would indeed have been my grave, but for you," Winnie faltered.

His face darkened with a look of pain and remorse. "If you knew what I have suffered since yesterday! the agony of self-reproach."

"My poor Noel, your face speaks for you," she interrupted, with a faint smile. "But you need not have reproached yourself; it was a pure accident."

"Are you badly hurt, my darling?" he asked anxiously.

"I am a little bruised and stiff—nothing more."

"You escaped without injury from that terrible fall," I exclaimed. "It seems a miracle."

"It was indeed little short of one," she answered gravely. "Let me try to tell you how it happened. After I fell from the cliff—was it only yesterday? it seems *so* long ago—I must have been unconscious for some time. When I recovered I found myself lying on a projecting ledge of rock, my dress entangled in a straggling brier. Though not injured I was terribly bruised and shaken, and the ledge was so narrow that I dared not stir for fear of falling again. I cried for help, but my voice was drowned in the noise of the breakers, and the mist hid me from your sight. As I looked up despairingly, thinking every moment would be my last, I noticed a hollow in the cliff just above me, like the mouth of a natural cavern, half-hidden by brambles and furze-bushes. The thought flashed across me that it must be the entrance to the old "Smugglers' Passage," and that if I could creep into it I should be safe till you found me. With some difficulty, for the opening was only just large enough to admit me, I succeeded, disturbing a whole colony of sea-gulls who had built their nests inside. But another danger threatened me, which I could not

foresee. I was beginning to get accustomed to my position, and to feel thankful for my merciful escape, when I heard a curious sound in the cliff above me—a cracking, rending noise. A quantity of loose stones and gravel came rushing down before the opening, half blinding me, and almost at the same moment I found myself in total darkness. A mass of rock and earth falling from the upper part of the cliff had blocked up the entrance, making me a prisoner. At first I hardly realised what had happened, but when I found that I was actually walled up in the cliff a dreadful fear seized me. Still I did not yet despair. I resolved to make my way along the passage, hoping to find another outlet in the tower. It was a steep incline, with rough steps at intervals, and it brought me, as I expected, to a vault. But, to my horror, I could find no outlet of any sort. I groped round the damp stone walls again and again before I could believe it, then sank down, as if stunned. I pictured you all seeking for me in vain; poor grandpapa's grief—Noel's despair. I thought what my fate would be, dying of slow starvation in the dreadful darkness of that living tomb."

She broke off, shuddering; then, after a moment's pause, went on again.

"The time dragged by till, from sheer exhaustion, I fell into a deep dreamless sleep, which must have lasted many hours. At length I woke with a start, thrilling in every nerve with a strange conviction that Noel was somewhere near me. I sat up, stretching out my arms in the darkness, calling to him, imploring him to come to me. When at last he replied, the sudden joy and relief overcame me, and I fainted."

"Never while I live shall I forget what I felt when I heard your voice," said Noel, in a low tone of deep emotion. "And yet it was scarcely surprise. I, too, had the same instinctive conviction that you were near me. My spirit was conscious of yours ——"

They clasped hands and were silent a moment; a silence I would not interrupt, for I saw they were blissfully oblivious of my presence.

"Noel," Winnifred whispered after a pause, in a tone half playful, half serious, and wholly tender; "when you offer me the ring again I shall not refuse it. I think you believe now that I love you—a little?"

"I was mad ever to doubt it, as Mr. Glynn told me. But you need not fear, Winnie," he added with a smile, "the 'green-eyed monster' will never come between us again. I have learnt a lesson in self-control that I shall remember all my life."

"Thus, out of evil comes good," I put in sententiously. "But listen; I hear footsteps outside."

There was a moment's pause—a sound of whispering voices, then the heavy door suddenly swung open, and Walter Borlace appeared on the threshold, followed by the old shipowner and two men, whom I recognised as police-constables.

Hastily signing to Tremaine to place himself so that Winnie's figure was hidden, I advanced towards the intruders, who seemed not a little astonished at my presence.

"What does this mean?" I enquired, looking from one to the other.

"It means, Mr. Glynn, that these men have a warrant for the arrest of Noel Tremaine," young Borlace answered. "We tracked him here, and ——"

"May I ask of what I am accused?" Noel interrupted, with a coolness which seemed to take them all by surprise.

Before the other could reply, Michael Carlyon stepped forward. He was a tall, stately old man, with silver hair, and a handsome weather-beaten face, pale and haggard just now.

"Noel," he began, in an agitated voice, "they tell me that—that you killed my darling in a fit of jealousy—" (there was a smothered exclamation from the background, which passed unnoticed)—"but now I look you in the face I can't believe it. It was an accident; you did not—you could not have intended to ——"

"Heaven knows I did not, Mr. Carlyon," the young man answered earnestly; "but I don't ask you to take my word for it. Here is a witness who will speak for me."

He stepped back, and showed—Winnifred, who rose hastily to her feet, and quickly sought the shelter of her grandfather's arms.

I shall not attempt to describe the scene which followed; old Carlyon's joy, Walter Borlace's amazement, and the bewilderment of the two police-constables, who suddenly found themselves de trop.

When the first excitement had subsided, Winnie, after describing how the accident occurred, repeated what has already been told—often interrupted by the questions and exclamations of her hearers. When she had concluded, she turned to Walter Borlace.

"Was it you, Walter, who first suggested that monstrous accusation?" she asked, in a tone which brought the blood to his cheek. He hung his head, muttering something inaudible. After a moment's struggle with himself, however, he turned to his rival.

"Tremaine, I don't know whether you can ever forgive me," he began, awkwardly enough, but with evident sincerity. "I feel heartily ashamed of my unjust suspicion, and ——"

"Let us shake hands and say no more about it," Noel interrupted, suiting the action to the word. "Even if I were disposed to resent it, my heart is too full of thankfulness just now to have room for any other feeling."

"Well spoken," said the old shipowner heartily; "you can afford to be generous, my boy. And now," he added, "the sooner we get home the better for this young lady, who is looking like a little ghost."

"You must please to consider the Vicarage your home, for to-night at least," I put in.

"Thank you, Mr, Glynn, that's kind. Can you manage to walk so far, my dear, or shall Noel carry you?"

Winnie essayed a few steps, then paused, looking white and faint.

"I think I shall have to trust myself to Noel," she said shyly, blushing as she looked up at him.

He stepped forward, nothing loth, lifting her as easily as if she had been a child.

"Yes, you may trust yourself to me, my darling," I heard him whisper as he passed out. "These arms shall guard and serve you faithfully all your life to come."

Winnie made no verbal reply, but the sigh of rest and contentment with which she let her head sink on his shoulder was an answer more eloquent than words.

FROM THE GERMAN.

Ah, love me not! to no one here
Has love for me brought gladness yet;
Whatever light I held most dear,
In sorrow or in death has set.

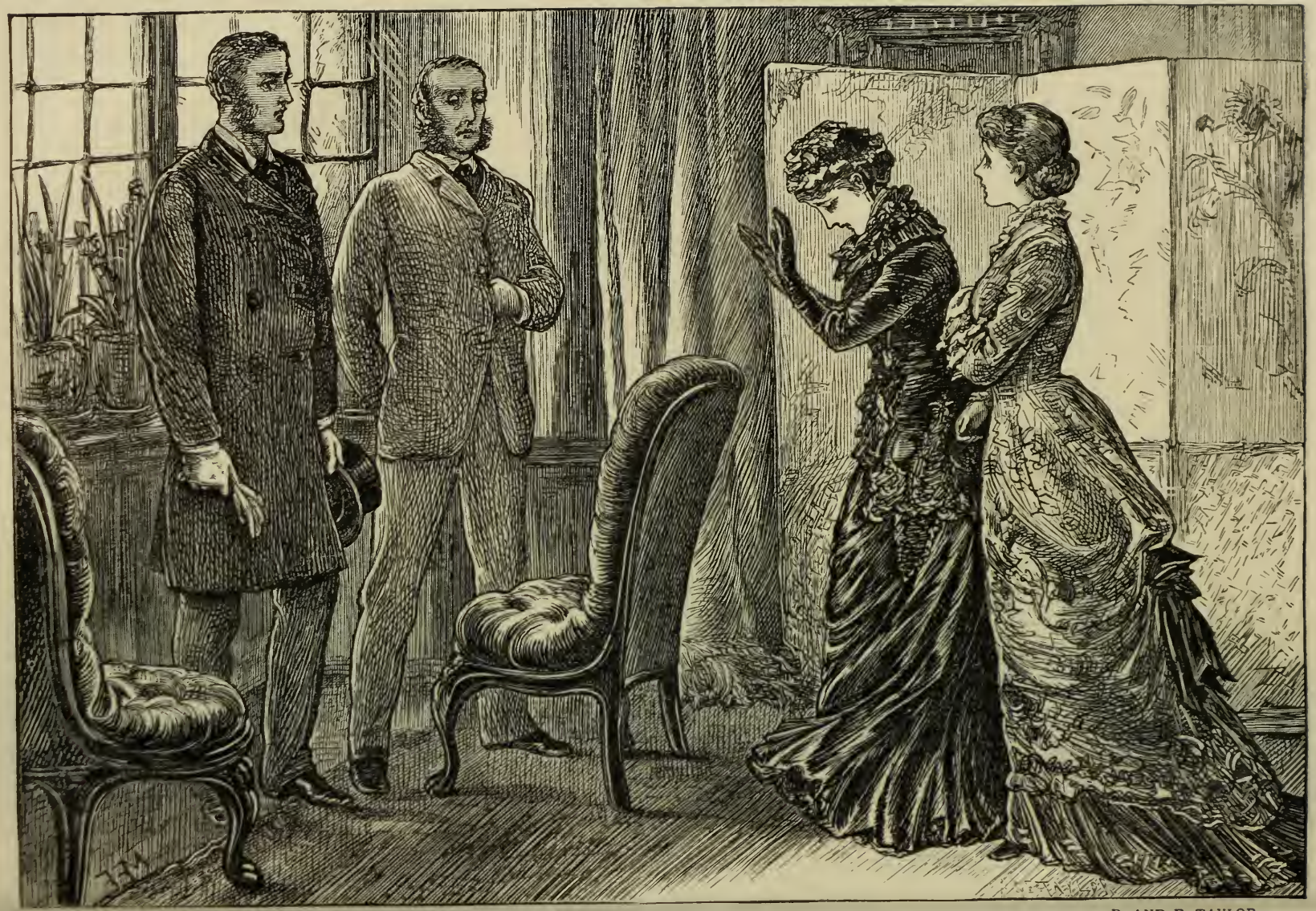
Leave me to tread my path alone,
Whether it lie through glow or gloom,
The radiance which thy love has thrown
Must fade before my coming doom.

Since that fond heart has learned to know,
And spread for mine its priceless store,
Those eyes have lost their laughing glow,
That cheek's fresh roses bloom no more.

Shivers my soul with boding chill,
Whispers a voice I may not flee—
"Arm thyself! watch! remember still
Life and its dreams are past for thee."

Ah, dearest friend, if all should end
Sooner than thou wouldst have me go,
One flower, at least, at All Souls' Feast,
Lay on his grave who loved thee so!

A. H. D.



THE ARGOSY.

NOVEMBER, 1881.

COURT NETHERLEIGH.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXXI.

DESPAIR.

THE year had gone on, and the season was at its full height. In the breakfast-room at Sir Francis Netherleigh's house in Grosvenor Square, sat his sister, waiting to pour out the coffee. Ah, how different things were from what they had been in his wife's time!—now so well regulated and so pleasant! Then he had had to wait upon himself at breakfast, to take it alone; now he always found his sister down before him.

Mary was good-looking as ever, her wonderful grey eyes, as Miss Margery used to call them, were not a whit less beautiful; but the light-hearted mirth of early days had given place to a calm, sad seriousness. It could be seen that some great wave of sorrow had passed over her heart and left its traces there for ever. At this moment, as she laid down a letter she had been reading, her face wore an especial air of sadness, somewhat of perplexity. Sir Francis entered.

"I have a letter from Netherleigh, Francis, from Alice Dalrymple," began Mary, after they had said good morning. "Mrs. Dalrymple has met with an accident, and—but I will read you what she says," she broke off, taking up the letter.

"'Selina was driving mamma in a borrowed pony-chaise yesterday; the pony took fright at a passing caravan—a huge thing, Selina says, covered with brooms and baskets and shining tins—ran away, and overturned the chaise. Selina was not hurt, she never is; but mamma has received, it is feared, some internal injury. She asks if you will come down to her, dear Mary. Lose no time; you know how she values you.'"

"Mistress Selina was driving carelessly, I expect," observed Sir Francis.

"Of course I will go down. But it cannot be to-day, Francis?"

"Not very well," he answered, as he took his cup of coffee from her hand. "What should I do with the people, coming here to-night, without a hostess to receive them?"

For Sir Francis Netherleigh had bidden the great world of London to his house that evening. Such invitations from him were rare indeed. This was the first he had given since his wife's departure and his mother's death.

"True," observed Mary in answer. "And you also expect that gentleman and his wife, who are just home from India, to lunch here to-day. I will write to Alice and tell her I cannot be with her until to-morrow. Her mother is not so ill, I trust, as to make a day's delay of moment. Perhaps you will go down with me, Francis?"

"I will if I can. I know I am wanted at Court Netherleigh."

"That is settled, then. And now tell me—will the Hopes also be here at luncheon?"

"Yes; I asked them last night to meet the Didnums. As I told you, Mary, the Hopes and the Didnums were great friends when in India."

Although Francis Netherleigh had put away his wife, the intimate relations that had existed between himself and her family had not been interrupted. He was sometimes at Lord Acorn's and at Colonel Hope's, and they were often with him. Mr. Didnum, the head of a vast mercantile house in Calcutta, in constant correspondence with that of Grubb and Howard in London, was an old friend of Colonel Hope, and they were now about to meet at luncheon in Grosvenor Square.

Breakfast over, Sir Francis Netherleigh went to Leadenhall Street as usual, returning in time to receive his visitors—the Didnums and the Hopes. Frances Chenevix, who was staying with her sister, Lady Sarah Hope, made one of the party. "I don't know whether I am expected, or whether I am not, but I shall *go*," she remarked to Lady Sarah, in her customary careless fashion. And go she did—and had the warmest welcome. Everybody liked gay-hearted Frances Chenevix, who was just as genial as her mother was tart.

The luncheon had been over some little time, and they were all talking together with interest, when a telegram was brought in for Miss Lynn. It proved to be from the Rector of Netherleigh, the Reverend Thomas Cleveland.

"Mrs. Dalrymple has undergone an operation and is in a very low condition. Come to her at once. I am sending also to Leadenhall Street to your brother. She is asking for him."

A message such as this causes confusion. All the company shared it. Sir Francis looked to ascertain at what time they were likely to find a train to carry them to Netherleigh, and found they could just catch one if they started at once. A servant was sent out for the fleetest-looking cab he could see: there was no time to get the carriage round.

Mary Lynn was already seated in the cab, and Sir Francis was shaking hands with Colonel Hope, who had come out to the door, when he remembered the guests bidden to his house that night. It caused him to pause.

"You must stay here and receive them for me, Colonel; be host in my place, and your wife hostess, if she will be so good," he hastily decided. "Explain to everybody how it is: dying wishes must be attended to, you know: and my getting back is, I daresay, out of the question."

"All right," answered Colonel Hope. "Don't wait, or you will lose your train."

"All right," the Colonel had said, and returned indoors, went back to the dining-room and told his wife what was required of them. Lady Sarah stared in perplexity.

"Receive the people to-night!—play host and hostess here, you and I! Why, we *cannot*, Colonel. Did you forget that we dine with those people at Hounslow? It's hard to say at *what* time we shall get back."

Colonel Hope looked a little perplexed too. "I did forget it," he said in his solemn way. "What is to be done?"

"Let mamma be here early and receive them," suggested Lady Frances, ever ready in an emergency. "I will help her."

It was an excellent solution to the difficulty. Mr. and Mrs. Didnum took their departure; and Lady Sarah Hope, accompanied by her sister Frances, entered her carriage and ordered it to Chenevix House. The Colonel walked away to his club.

Lady Acorn was alone when they entered. She listened to the news her daughters told her of her son-in-law's being summoned away, and of the request that she would take his place that night, and receive his guests.

"I suppose I must," said she, in her tart way; "but I shall have to get round to Grosvenor Square at an inconveniently early hour. Something is sure to happen when you want things to go particularly smoothly. She'll let Selina drive her out again, I should think! And now—who do you suppose is here?" continued Lady Acorn.

"How can we tell, mamma?" cried Frances, before Sarah had time to speak. "Is it Mary?"

"It is Adela."

"*Adela!*"

The Countess nodded. "She and MacIvor arrived here this morning by the Scotch mail. It surprised me, I can tell you. Sandy had an unexpected summons to London, from the lawyers who are acting for him in the action about that small property he lays claim to; and when he was starting from home, nothing would do for Adela, it seems, but she must accompany him."

"Is Harriet come?" asked Lady Sarah.

'No. Sandy goes back in a day or two."

"And Adela? Does she go back with him?"

"*I* don't know. Sir Sandy says she seems miserable with them, and he thinks she will be miserable everywhere. A fine market she has brought her chickens to, she and her vagaries!" concluded Lady Acorn with rancour.

"Where is she?" asked Frances.

"Upstairs somewhere, in hiding; Grace is with her. Grace pities her and soothes her just as though she were a martyr—instead of a silly woman who has wilfully blighted her own happiness in life, and entailed no end of anxiety on us all."

After their short stay in Paris in the spring, where we last saw Lady Adela, the MacIvors went straight to Scotland, avoiding London and the cost that would have attended a London season, which they could ill afford. Adela also shrank from that; she would have quitted them had they sojourned in the metropolis. They took up their abode in the Highlands, in the old castle that was the paternal stronghold of the MacIvors, which was utterly bleak, dull, and remote: and here, for the past three months, Adela had been slowly dying of remorse.

No wonder. Her whole being was filled with the image of her husband; with the longing only to see him again, with bitter, unavailing regret for the past. That one solitary sight of him in Paris, at Mrs. Blunt's, had revived within her the pain and the excitement, which had been previously subsiding into a sort of dull apathy. The château in Switzerland had been, as a residence, lonely and wearisome; it was nothing, in those respects, compared with this old castle of Sir Sandy's. At least, Adela found it so. In fact, she did not know what she wanted. She shrank from the bare suggestion of publicity, and she shrank from solitude. She felt herself to be in the position of one whose whole interest in life has departed while yet a long life lies before her: the saddest of all sad positions, and the most rare.

Was it to continue so for ever? Yes, she would wail out in answer, when asking herself the question: at least, for so long as time should last. For there could be no change in it. She had forfeited all possibility of that. The lone, miserable, dreary woman that she was now, must she remain to the end.

She wondered sometimes whether the life would kill her, whether anybody ever died of regret. She wondered whether she could continue to bear it, and live. Existence was becoming cruelly painful, all but unendurable. When she opened her weary eyelids to the dawn of a fresh day, she would moan out a faint prayer that God in His compassion would help her to get through it, and would bury her face on the pillow, wishing she could so bury herself and her misery.

It must not be thought she was encouraged in this state of mind. Lady Harriet MacIvor had become intolerably cross long ago, openly telling Adela she had no patience with her. From her Adela had

no sympathy whatever. Look where she would, not a gleam of brightness shone. Not a gleam would ever shine for her again. Sick at heart, fainting in spirit, it seemed to Adela that any change would be welcome; and when Sir Sandy received a letter one morning, telling him his presence was needed in London, and he announced his intention of starting that same day, Adela said she should go with him.

Lady Harriet did not oppose it. In truth, it brought her relief. Adela was becoming more of a responsibility day by day; and she had held some anxious conferences with her husband as to the expediency of resigning their charge.

"It is the best thing that could have happened, Sandy," she said to him, in private. "Take her over to mamma, and tell her everything. I think they had better keep her themselves for a time."

Hence the unexpected irruption of the Scotch travellers at Chenevix House. Lady Acorn was not pleased. Not that she was sorry to see Adela again, but she had lived in a chronic state of anger with her since the separation; and the accounts written to her from time to time by her daughter Harriet, did not tend to diminish it.

After the briefest interview with her mother, Adela escaped to the chamber assigned her; the one she used to occupy. This left Sir Sandy free to open the budget his wife had charged him with, and to say that just for the present he and Harriet would rather not continue to have the responsibility of Adela. Lady Acorn, as she listened, audibly wished Adela was a child again, that she might "have the nonsense shaken out of her."

Lady Sarah Hope raised her condemnatory shoulders. She had never had the slightest sympathy with the trouble Adela had brought upon herself, or with the remorse it entailed. She had wilfully entered on the thorny road, and must abide by it.

"Will you see her, Sarah?" asked Lady Acorn.

"No, I would rather not. At least, not to-day. I must be going shortly."

Poor Adela! True, she had been guilty of grievous offences, but they had brought their punishment. As we sow, so do we generally reap. This return to her mother's home seemed to bring back all the past sin, all the present anguish in colours ten-fold more vivid.

Kneeling on the floor in the bed-room, her hands clasped round Grace's knees as she sat, Adela sobbed out her bitter pain, her repentance, her hopeless longings for the life and the husband she had thrown away.

"Poor child!" sighed Grace, her own tears falling as she stroked with a gentle hand her unhappy sister's hair, "your sorrow is, I see, hard to bear. If I but knew how to comfort you!"

No answer. Except sobs and blinding tears.

"Yet, Adela, although he is still, in one sense of the word, your husband, it is not well for you to indulge these thoughts, these

regrets. Were there even the most distant hope that things between you would alter, it would be different; but I fear there is not."

"I *know* there is not," bewailed Adela. "What he did, he did for—for ever. In that lies the sting."

"Then you should no longer, for your own peace' sake, dwell upon his memory."

"I saw him in Paris. Did you know it?"

"Harriet mentioned it in one of her letters. Try and forget him. It seems curious advice, Adela, but I have none better to give."

"I *can't* forget him. He is my husband, and how can I? My dreams by night, my thoughts by day, are of him, of him alone. If I could but be with him for just one week of reconciliation, to show him how I would if possible atone to him, to let him see that my repentance is true and bitter, though he put me away again at the end, it would be something. Oh, Grace, you don't know what my remorse is—how hard a cross I have to bear!"

She lay there in her bitter distress. Not much less distressing was it to Grace. By dint of coaxing—Lady Acorn would have applied scolding—Adela was at length partially calmed, and lay back, half exhausted, in an easy chair.

At lunch time, for this had occurred in the morning, she refused to go down or take anything, saying she could not eat. In the afternoon, when Grace was back again, Davvy brought up a cup of chocolate and some toast. Whilst taking this in a languid manner, her usual manner now, Adela abruptly renewed the subject: the only one, as she truly said, that ever occupied her mind.

"Do you see him often, Grace?"

"Rather often," replied Grace, knowing that the question must refer to Sir Francis.

"He is friendly with you, then?"

"Quite so. The friendship has never been interrupted. We are going to his house to-night," she added, perhaps incautiously.

"To *his* house? To Grosvenor Square?" cried Adela, leaning forward in the large chair, and putting down her chocolate.

"Yes. I think it is the first entertainment he has given since you left it. The first, at any rate, on a grand scale. Half London will be there."

"If I could but go!" exclaimed Adela, a flush rising to her pale cheek. Grace looked at her in surprise: she had forfeited the right even to enter there. Grace made no comment, and a pause ensued.

"Did you read the speech he made last Thursday night to the Commons?" resumed Adela, in a low tone.

"Yes. Everyone was talking of it. Did *you* read it, Adela?—up in Scotland?"

Grace received no answer. Sir Sandy below could have told her that Adela would seize upon the *Times*, when it arrived, with feverish interest, to see whether any speech of her husband's was quoted in it.

If so, Sir Sandy's belief was that she learnt it by heart, so long did she keep the paper.

The chocolate taken up again and finished, she lay back in the chair, her eyes looking into vacancy, her listless hands folded before her. Grace, sitting opposite, ostensibly occupied with some work, for she was rarely idle, had leisure to note her sister's countenance. It was much changed. Worn, wan and weary it looked, but there was no special appearance now of ill health.

"You are much better, are you not, Adela?"

"Oh, I am very well," was the languid rejoinder.

"Do you like Scotland?"

"I don't know."

Grace thought she was tired after the night journey, and resolved to leave her to silence; but an interruption occurred. Frances came in.

And, that Frances Chenevix could put her face into a mournful form for more than a minute at any time, was not to be expected. In spite of Adela's evidently low state of mind, she, after a few staid sentences, ran off at a gay tangent.

"What *do* you think, Gracie?" she began. "We had very nearly lost our party to-night—one, Adela, that your whilom husband gives. He and his sister have been telegraphed for this afternoon to Netherleigh. Poor Mrs. Dalrymple has met with some serious accident; there has been an operation, and the result is, I suppose, uncertain. They have both started by train, and therefore cannot be at home to receive the people."

"Is the party put off, then?" questioned Grace.

"No, there was not time: how could he send round to all the world and his wife? It is to take place without him, mamma playing host in his absence."

"I wonder what Mrs. Dalrymple could want with him?"

"Just what I wondered, Grace. Mamma thinks it must be to speak to him about her affairs. He is her executor, I believe: not, poor woman, that she has much to leave."

Adela had lifted her head, listening to this in silence: an eager look was dawning on her face.

"Do you mean to say, Frances, that he—that my husband—will not be there at all?—in his own house?"

"Of course I mean it, Adela. He cannot be in two places at once, here and at Netherleigh. He and Mary Lynn have but now started on their way thither. I tell mamma that while she plays host I shall play hostess. Won't it be fun!"

Little did Frances Chenevix dream of the fruit these words were to bear—of the trouble they would bring forth. A small, passing trouble, it is true, nothing more, and one that left no consequences behind it.

"Grace," began Adela very quietly, after her sisters had left, for Lady Sarah, thinking better of it, came up to see her for a moment, "I shall go with you to-night."

"Go—where did you say?" questioned Grace, in doubt.

"To my husband's house."

Grace dropped her work in consternation. "You cannot mean it, Adela."

"I do mean it. I shall go."

"Oh, Adela, pray consider what you are saying. Go *there!* Why, you know that you must not."

"It was my house once," said Adela in agitation.

"But it is yours no longer. Pray consider. Of all people in the world, you must not attempt to enter it. It would not be seemly."

Adela burst into tears. "If you knew—if you knew how I long for a sight of it, Gracie," she gasped, her tone one of imploring prayer, "you would not deny me. Only just one little look at it, Gracie dear! What can it matter? *He* is not there."

How Grace, who had a tender heart, would have contrived to combat this wish, cannot be told: but Lady Acorn came in. In answer to her quick questioning of what Adela was crying about now, Grace deemed it well to tell her.

"Oh," said the Countess, taking up the affair lightly; nay, rather jocosely, for truly she did not suppose Adela could be in earnest. "Go *there*, would you! What would the world say, I wonder, if they met Lady Adela Netherleigh at that house? Don't be silly, child."

What indeed! Adela sighed and said no more. But yet, she did so want to go. Lying back in her chair, her thoughts busy with the past and present, the longing took a terrible hold upon her.

She dressed, but did not go down to dinner, refusing that meal as she had refused luncheon: she could not eat any if she went down, was all she said. But that Lord Acorn was away from home for a few days, Grace might have thought she shrank from sitting at table with her father.

Lady Acorn went straight from the dinner-table to Grosvenor Square, calling on her way at Colonel Hope's for her daughter Frances, as had been arranged. Grace, who did not care to leave Adela alone for too long an evening, would go later with Sir Sandy. She hastened to dress, not having done so for the party before dinner, and then went to her sister's room to remain with her to the last moment.

But when Grace got there, she found, to her dismay, that Adela *was prepared to go also.* Her fan lay on the table, her gloves beside it.

"Adela, indeed you must not!" decisively spoke Grace. "Only think how—how—I said it this afternoon—*unseemly* it will be."

"If you only knew how I am yearning for it," came the piteous answer, and Adela entwined her wasted arms entreatingly about her sister. "My own home once, Gracie, my own home once! I seem to be dying for a sight of it."

Never had Grace felt so perplexed, rarely so distressed. "Adela,

I *dare* not sanction it; dare not take you. What would be said and thought? Mamma ——"

"You need not take me; I don't wish to get you into trouble with mamma. Davvy can tell them to get a cab. Grace, you have no right to oppose me," went on Adela in a low, firm tone: "what right can you have? My husband will not be there, and I must see my old home. It may be the last time I shall have the chance of it."

Sir Sandy's step was heard outside in the corridor, passing to his chamber. Grace opened the door, and told him of the trouble. He put his little head inside and said a few words to Adela in his mild way, begging her not to attempt to go; and then went on, to his room.

"I must go, Gracie; I *must* go! Oh, Gracie, don't look harshly at me, for I am very miserable."

What was Grace to do? She had rarely been in such perplexity. A little more coaxing and combatting, and she yielded in very helplessness. How could she help it? The conviction lay upon her that if she refused to the end, Adela would certainly go alone. When an ardent desire, such as this, takes possession of one weakened in spirit and in health, it assumes the form of a fever that must have its course.

The contention delayed them, and it was late when they went down to the carriage. Little Sir Sandy took his seat in it opposite Grace and Adela.

"I wash my hands of it," he said, amiably. "Please do not let your mother put the blame of it upon me, Lady Adela, and tell me I ought not to have brought you."

A few minutes, and the carriage stopped in Grosvenor Square. Other guests were entering the house at the same time. Adela shrank behind Grace and Sir Sandy and was not observed in the crowd. Her dress was black net, as it had been at Mr. Blunt's, though she was not in mourning now; she kept her thin black burnous cloak on and held it up to her face. She passed close to Hilson. The man stepped back in astonishment, recollected himself, and saluted her with an impassive face.

Keeping in the shade as much as was possible, shrinking into corners to avoid observation, Adela lost the others. She heard their names shouted out in a louder voice than Hilson's, "Lady Grace Chenevix and Sir Sandy MacIvor," and she lingered behind looking about her.

How painful to her was the sight of the old familiar spots! She turned into a small niche and halted there; her heart beating too painfully to go on. No, she should not be able to carry this expedition out; she saw now how wrong and foolish it was to attempt it: she had put herself into a false position, and she felt it in every tingling vein.

Just one peep she would give at the drawing-rooms above. Nobody

would notice her. Amid the crowds pressing in, for the people were in the full flow of arrival, she should escape observation. Just one yearning look, and then she would turn back and escape the way she came.

This was a favourable moment. Three or four people in a group, strangers to her, were passing upwards. Adela glided on behind them. Their names were shouted out as her sister's and Sir Sandy's had been; as others were; and she stole after them within the portals.

But only to steal back again. Nay, to start back. For a too well-remembered voice had greeted the visitors. "I am so glad to see you," and a tall, distinguished form stood there with outstretched hands: the voice and form of her husband. Later, she knew how it was. The faintness succeeding to the operation (a very slight one), which had alarmed Mrs. Dalrymple herself and also in a degree the surgeon and the Rector, had passed off, and she was really in no danger. So that when Sir Francis learnt this on his arrival at Netherleigh, he found himself at liberty to return.

Feeling as if she must die in her agony of shame, shame at her unwarrantable intrusion, which the unexpected sight of her husband brought home to her, Adela got down the stairs again unseen and unnoticed, and encountered Hilson in the hall.

"Can I do anything for you, my lady?—can I get you anything?" he asked, his tone betraying his compassion for her evident sickness.

"Yes," she said, "yes:" and she absolutely put her hand on his arm for momentary support, feeling that she must faint and fall. "I want to go home; I find I am not well enough to stay: perhaps one of the carriages outside would take me?"

"Can *I* assist you, Lady Adela?" said a voice at her side, from one who was then entering and had overheard the colloquy: and Adela turned to behold Gerard Hope.

"Is it you?" she faintly cried. "I thought you were abroad, Gerard. Are you making one of the crowd here to-night?"

"Not as a guest. These grand things no longer belong to me. I am in England again and at work—a clerk in your husband's house, Lady Adela; and I have come here to-night to see him on a matter of pressing business."

Hilson managed it all. An obliging coachman, then setting down his freight, was only too willing to take home a sick lady. Gerard Hope and Hilson both went out with her.

"Don't say to—to anyone—that I came, Hilson," she whispered as she shrank into a corner of the carriage: and Hilson discerned that by "anyone" she must especially mean Sir Francis Netherleigh.

"You may depend upon me, my lady. Chenevix House," he added to the friendly coachman: and closed the door on the unhappy woman who was once his master's indulged and idolized wife.

"How sadly she is changed!" thought Gerard, gazing after the carriage as it bowled away. "Hilson," he said, turning to the butler,

"I must see your master for a minute or two. Have you any room that you can put me into, away from this crowd?"

"There's the housekeeper's room, sir: if you don't mind going there. It's quite empty, I believe."

"All right. Tell Sir Francis I bring a note from Mr. Howard. Something important, I believe."

Sir Francis Netherleigh had encountered Gerard Hope in Calais, when passing through it the last time he came down from the French capital. Gerard then convinced him, and with truth, that he was totally innocent of the offence which his uncle, the Colonel, believed him guilty of, and which, combined with a few debts, had been keeping him in exile. Sir Francis, ever considerate and generous, paved the way for Gerard's return; that is, he advanced money for the most pressing of the creditors, and offered Gerard a post in his house in Leadenhall Street.

And when Colonel Hope got to know of this, he grew desperately angry, and accused Sir Francis of turning himself into a refuge for the ill-doing destitute.

CHAPTER XXXII.

VISITORS AT MOAT GRANGE.

THE time went on: autumn weather came in: and we must pay a visit to Netherleigh.

Things were almost coming to a revolt: never were poor tenant-farmers so ground down and oppressed as those on the estate of Moat Grange. Rents were raised, fines imposed, expenses, properly falling on landlords, refused to be paid or allowed for. Oscar Dalrymple, the present owner, was ruling with a hand of iron, hard and cruel.

At least, Oscar got the credit of it. In point of fact he was perhaps a little ashamed of the existing state of things, and would have somewhat altered it if he could. A year ago Oscar had let the whole estate to a sort of agent, a man named Pinnett, and Pinnett was playing Old Gooseberry with everything.

That was the expressive phrase the indignant people used. They refused to lay the blame on Pinnett, utterly refused to recognise him in the matter; arguing, perhaps rightly, that unless he had Mr. Dalrymple's sanction to harsh measures he could not exercise them, and that Mr. Dalrymple was, therefore, alone to blame. Most likely Oscar had no resource but to sanction it all, tacitly at any rate.

As to the Grange itself, the mansion, it was now the dreariest of the dreary. That not having been let with the estate, Oscar and his wife still lived in it. Two maids were kept, and a man for out-door work—the garden and the poultry. Most of the rooms were locked up. Selina would unlock the doors sometimes and open the shutters; and pace about the lonely floors, and wish she had not

been guilty of the folly which had led to these wretched retrenchments. Things, indoors and out, were getting worse day by day.

One morning Mr. Lee called at the Grange: a respectable man, whose name you cannot have forgotten. He had rented all his life, and his father before him, under the Dalrymples.

"Sir," he began to Oscar, without any circumlocution, "I have come up about that paper which has been sent to me by Jones, your lawyer. It's a notice that next Michaelmas, when my lease will expire, the rent is to be raised."

"Well?" said Mr. Dalrymple.

"A pound an acre. *A pound an acre*," repeated the farmer with increased emphasis. "Jones must have made a mistake, sir."

"I fancy not. But Jones is not my lawyer, you know; he is Mr. Pinnett's."

"We don't want to have anything to do with Mr. Pinnett, or to hear his name, sir. I have always rented under the Dalrymples; and I hope to do it still, sir, with your leave."

"You know, Lee, that Pinnett has a lease of the whole estate. What he proposes is no doubt fair. Your farm will well bear the increased rent he means to put on it."

"Increased by a pound a acre!" cried the farmer, in his excitement. "No, sir; it won't bear it, for I'll never pay it."

"I am sorry for that, Mr. Lee, because it will leave Pinnett only one alternative: to substitute in its place a notice to quit."

"To quit! to quit the farm!" reiterated Mr. Lee, in his astonishment. "Why, it has been my home all my life, sir, and it was my father's before me. I was born on that farm, Mr. Dalrymple, years and years before you ever came into the world, and I mean to die on it. I have spared neither money nor labour to bring it to its present flourishing condition."

"My good sir, I say as you do, that the land is flourishing; sufficiently so to justify the advanced rent Pinnett proposes. Two of you were here yesterday on this same errand—Watkins and Bumford."

"They have spent money on their farms, too, expecting to reap future benefit. You see, we never thought of Mr. Dalrymple's dying young, and ——"

"Are you speaking of young Robert Dalrymple?"

"No, no, poor fellow; of his father. Mr. Dalrymple did die young, so to say; you can't call a man under fifty old. His death, and his son's close upon it, brought you, sir, to rule over us, and I am sorry to say your rule's a very hard one."

"It will not be made easier," curtly replied Oscar Dalrymple, who was getting angry. "And I will not detain you longer, Mr. Lee," he added, rising. "Your time is valuable."

"And what is to be my answer, sir?"

"It no longer lies with me to give an answer, Lee, and I must request that you do not refer to me again. Pinnett's answer will no

doubt be that you must renew the lease at the additional rent demanded, or else give up the farm."

Farmer Lee swung away in a passion. In turning out of the first field he met two ladies : one young and very pretty, the other getting to look old ; her thin features were white, and her hair was grey. They were Mrs. Dalrymple and Mary Lynn. Close upon Mrs. Dalrymple's recovery from her accident, which turned out to have been not at all formidable, she caught a violent cold ; it laid her up longer than a cold had ever laid her up before, and seemed to have tried her greatly. Mary Lynn had now just come again to Netherleigh to stay a week or two with her.

"Is it you, ma'am ! " cried the farmer, touching his hat. "I'm glad to see you out again."

"At one time I thought I never should come out again," she answered ; "I am very weak still. And how are you, Mr. Lee ? "

"Middling, ma'am. Anything but well just now, in temper." And the farmer touched upon his grievances, and spoke of the interview he had just held at the Grange, and of its master's harshness.

"*Is* it right to us, ma'am ? " he wound up with. "*Is* it just, Miss Lynn ? " turning to that young lady. "Ah, if poor young Mr. Robert had but lived ! We should have had no oppression then."

Mary turned away her face, blushing almost to tears with unhappy remembrances. Robert ! Robert !

"I do believe it will come to a revolt ! " said the farmer to Mrs. Dalrymple. "Not with us tenants ; you know better than to think that likely, ma'am ; but with those people at the cottages. They are getting ripe for it."

"Ay," she answered, in a low, grieved tone. "And the worst of it, Mr. Lee, the worst to me is, that I am powerless for help or remedy."

"We cannot quite think—it is impossible to think or believe, that Mr. Oscar Dalrymple should have put all control out of his power. Therefore, his refusing to interfere with Pinnett seems all the more harsh. You must see that, ma'am."

"I have no comfort, no advice to give," she whispered, putting her hand into Mr. Lee's as she turned away. For Mrs. Dalrymple could not *bear* to speak of the existing state of things, the trouble that had come of Selina's folly and Oscar's rule.

Yet Oscar was kind to her. Continuously so. In no way would he allow her income, that which he allowed her, to be in the slightest degree diminished. He pinched himself, but he would not pinch poor Mrs. Dalrymple. Over and over again had she wished Reuben to leave her, but Oscar would not hear of it. Neither, for the matter of that, would Reuben. He did not want wages, he said, but he would not desert his mistress in her premature old age, her sickness, and her sorrow. A small maid only was kept in addition to Reuben ; and the man had degenerated (as he might have called

it but for his loyalty) to little better than a man-of-all-work. He stood behind the ladies now at a respectful distance, having stopped when they stopped.

The grievance alluded to by Mr. Lee, ready to ripen into open revolt, had nothing to do with the tenant-farmers. It was this. In a favourable position on the estate as regarded situation, stood a cluster of small dwellings. They were for the most part very poor, some of them little better than huts, but they commanded a lovely view. They were inhabited by labourers employed on the land, and were called the Mill Cottages: a mill, done away with now, having formerly stood close by.

One fine day it had struck the new man, Pinnett—looking about here and there to discover if he could find means of adding to the profits he meant to make off the land—that if these cottages were taken down and handsome dwellings erected in their place, it would be a great improvement, pecuniarily and artistically, for such houses would let directly in this picturesque locality. No sooner thought of than resolved upon. Miles Pinnett was not a man to linger over his plans, and he gave these small tenants notice to quit.

It was rebelled against. Some of the men had been in the cottages as long as Farmer Lee had been in his farm, and to be ordered to leave seemed a terrible hardship. What no doubt increased the difficulty was, that there were no other small dwellings on the estate the men could go into: all others were already occupied: and if they left these they must go to a distance whence they would have a two or three miles' walk to their day's work. And so, encouraged perhaps by the feeling pervading the neighbourhood, of sympathy with them and want of sympathy with Pinnett, the men, one and all, refused to go out. The next step would be ejectment; and it was looked for day by day.

For all this, Oscar Dalrymple suffered. Suffered in opinion. Pinnett *could not* go the lengths he was going, oppress them as he was oppressing, against the will of the owner, Mr. Dalrymple, argued the community, rich and poor. Perhaps he could not. But how it really was, no one knew, or what power Mr. Dalrymple had put out of his own hands, and into Pinnett's, when he leased him the demesne.

Farmer Lee's visit to Moat Grange was paid in the morning. In the afternoon the Grange had another visitor—Lady Adela Netherleigh.

Adela had not lingered long at her mother's in London. After a few weeks' sojourn she came down to Netherleigh Rectory, invited by the Rector and his wife, her sister Mary. They had come to London for a day, had been struck with compassion at Adela's evident state of mental suffering, and they asked her to return with them for a little change.

"It is not change I want," she had answered, speaking to Lady

Mary. "What I want is peace. Perhaps I shall find it with you, Mary, at the Rectory."

Lady Mary Cleveland hesitated. Peace? The word posed her.

"Adela," she said, "we should be very glad to have you, and there's plenty of room for you and Davvy. But, as to peace—I don't know about that. The Rectory is full of children great and small, and I'm afraid it is in a noise and bustle from morning till night."

Adela smiled faintly. The peace her heart craved for was not that imparted by the absence of noise. She might feel all the better for having the bustle of children about her; it might draw her at moments out of her own sorrow. But another thought struck her.

"My—" husband, she had been about to say, but changed the words. "Sir Francis is not staying at Court Netherleigh?—is he?"

"No. It is said he means to take up his abode there later; he is not there yet."

"Then I will come to you, Mary. And I will stay with you for months and months if I like it—and you must accept from me towards your housekeeping what Sir Sandy and Harriet did."

Lady Mary winced a little at that, but she did not say no. With all those children—she had two of her own now—and the Rector's moderate income, they could not be rich.

So Adela and Davvy went down with them to Netherleigh. That was a month or two ago now: and, so far as could be seen or judged, the change had not as yet effected much for her. Adela seemed just as before: wan, weary, sick and sorry.

And yet, there was a change; a change in a certain degree. The bitter rebellion at her fate had partly passed from her mind, and therefore its look had left her face. The active repining in which her days had been spent was giving place to a sort of hopeless resignation. She strove to accept her punishment, strove to bear it, to be patient and gentle always, hardly ever ceasing day or night to beseech God to blot out the past. The sense of shame entailed by her conduct of long years, had not lifted itself one iota; nay, it seemed to grow of a deeper scarlet as time went on. Sometimes she would think if she could trample upon herself, and annihilate all power of remembrance, she would do it gladly: but that would not stamp it out of her ever-living soul. Adela had erred; wilfully, cruelly, persistently: and if retribution ever came home to a woman, it surely had come to her.

On this same day, a very fine one, when the sky was blue and the afternoon sun lay on the green fields at Netherleigh, Lady Adela went out, and turned her languid steps towards Moat Grange. Selina had called to see her at the Rectory several times: each time Adela had promised to return visits, and had not yet done so.

The direct road lay, as the reader may perhaps remember, through the village and past Court Netherleigh. Lingeringly would her eyes look on the house whenever this happened; lingeringly they rested

on it now. The home, in which she had spent so many happy days with Aunt Margery, was closed to her for ever. Of all people in the living world, she was the only one debarred from entering it. Very rarely indeed was Sir Francis at Netherleigh. It had been supposed that he meant to take up his abode in it for the autumn months: but this appeared to be a mistake: when he did come it was but for a flying visit of a few hours. Mr. Cleveland privately told his wife that he believed Francis stayed away from the place because Adela was in it.

Selina was in the larger of the two drawing-rooms when Adela reached the Grange. Selina rarely used it now, her husband never, but she had gone into it this afternoon. Opening the shutters and the window, she sat there making herself a lace collar. The time had gone by when she could order these articles of a Madame Damereau, and pay a fabulous price for them.

Adela untied her bonnet strings and took off her gloves as she sat down opposite Selina. Not strong now, the walk had greatly tired her. Selina could but notice how fragile and delicate she looked, as the light from the window fell upon her face. The once rounded cheeks were wasted, their bright colour had faded to the faintest tinge of pink; from the once lustrous eyes shone only sadness.

"Let me get you something, Adela," cried Selina, impulsively. "A cup of tea? I will make it for you directly. Of wine—well, I am not sure, really, that we possess any. I can ask Oscar."

"Not anything, not anything," returned Adela, "I could not take it. Thank you all the same. As to my looks—I look as I always do."

"Ah me," sighed Selina, "it is a weary life. A weary life, Adela, for you and for me."

"If that were all—its weariness—it might be borne," murmured Adela: "and yet I do try to bear," she added, pushing her pretty brown hair from her aching brow, and for once induced to speak of her troubles to this friend, who had suffered too—though not as she had. "But there is the remorse as well, you see. Oh, how wrong, how foolish, how *wicked* we were!—at least *I* was. Do you ever think of our past folly, Selina?—of the ease and happiness we then held in our hands, and flung away?"

"We have paid for it," said Selina. "Yes, I do sometimes think of the past, Adela; and then I wonder at the folly of women. See to what folly has reduced me!—to drag on a dead-alive existence in a semi-prison: for the Grange is no better now, with never a friend to stay with me, or a shilling to spend. And all for the sake of a few fine bonnets and gowns! Would you believe it," she added, laughing, "that the costly things have not come half to an end yet?"

"Just for *that?*" dissented Adela, in her pain, and losing sight of Selina's trouble in her own. "If it had been for nothing more than that!"

"Well, well, we have paid for it, I say. Paid bitterly and cruelly."

"*I* have. You have not."

"No?" somewhat indifferently returned Selina, her attention partly given to her lace again, for she was never serious long. "How do you make that out?"

"You have your husband still. Poverty with him, with one we love, must carry little sting. But for me—my whole life is one of never-ending loneliness, without a future, without hope. Do you know what fanciful thought came to me the other night?" she went on, after a pause. "I have all kinds of fanciful ideas when I sit alone in the twilight. I thought that life might be so much happier if God gave us a chance once, during its course, of beginning it all over again from the first. Just once, when we found out what dreadful mistakes we had been making."

"And we should make the same again, though we began it fifty times over, Adela. Unless we could carry back with us our dearly-bought experience."

Adela sighed. "Yes, I suppose so. God would have ordered it so had it been well for us. He knows best. But there are some women who seem never to make mistakes, who go on their way smoothly and happily."

"Placing themselves under God's guidance, I imagine," returned Selina. "That's what my mother says to me, when she lectures me on the past."

Adela's eyes filled with tears. "Yes," she murmured, in meekness, recalling that it was what she had been striving to do for some little time now—to hold on her way, under submission to God.

Their conversation turned into other channels, and by-and-by, when Adela was rested, she rose to leave. Selina accompanied her into the hall.

"Won't you just say how d'ye do to my husband," she cried, opening the door of their common sitting-room. "He is here."

Adela made no objection, and followed Selina. Oscar was standing in the bay window, facing the door. And someone else, towering nearly a head above him, was standing at his side.

Sir Francis Netherleigh.

They stood, the husband and wife, face to face. With a faint cry, Adela put up her hands, as if to ward off the sight—as if to bespeak pardon in all humility for herself, for her intrusion, and disappeared again, whiter than death. It was rather an awkward moment for them all. Selina disappeared after her, and shut the door.

"Is Lady Adela ill?" asked Sir Francis of Oscar, the question breaking from him involuntarily in the moment's impulse—for she did, indeed, look fearfully so.

"Ay," replied Oscar, "ill with remembrance. Repentance has made her sick unto death. Remorse has told upon her."

But Sir Francis said no more.

Adela had departed across the fields with the best speed she could command. About half-way home she came upon Mr. Cleveland, seated on a stile and whistling softly.

"Those two young rascals of mine"—alluding to two of his little sons—"seduced me from my study to help fly their kites," he began to Adela. "Here I follow them, to the appointed field, and find them nowhere, little light-headed monkeys!—But, my dear, what's the matter with you?" he added, with fatherly kindness, as he remarked her pale, troubled face. "You look frightened."

"I have just seen my husband," she panted, her breath painfully short. All the old pain that she had been striving to subdue had come back again; the sight of him, whom she now passionately loved, had stirred all the distressing emotion within her.

"Well?" said Mr. Cleveland.

"Did you know he was at Netherleigh?"

"He came down to-day."

"He was in the bay parlour with Oscar, and I went into it. It—it has agitated me."

"But why should it agitate you?" rejoined the old Rector, who was very matter-of-fact. "It seems to me that you ought to accustom yourself to bear these chance meetings with equanimity, child. You can scarcely expect to go through life without seeing him now and then."

Adela bent her head and broke into sobs. Mr. Cleveland laid his protecting hand upon her shoulder.

"My dear, my dear! Strive to be calm. Surely a momentary sight of him ought not to put you into this state. Is it that you dislike him so much still?"

"Dislike him!" she exclaimed, the contrast between the word and the truth striking her painfully, and causing her to say more than she would have said. "I am dying for his forgiveness; dying to show him my remorse; dying because I lost him."

The Rector did not quite see what answer would be suitable to this. He held his tongue, and Adela resumed.

"I wish I were a Roman Catholic!"

The good man, evangelically Protestant, felt as if his grey hair were standing on end with surprise. "Oh, hush!" said he. "You don't know what you are saying."

"I do wish it," she sobbed. "I could go into a convent then, and find peace."

"Peace!" echoed Mr. Cleveland. "No, child, don't let your imagination run away with that notion. It is a false one. No woman, entering a convent in the frame of mind that you seem to be entertaining, could expect peace, or find it."

"Any way, I—I should feel more at rest. I should *have* to bear life then, you know. And, oh, I was trying to do so: I was indeed trying!"

Thoroughly put out, the Rector made no comment. Perhaps would not trust himself to make any.

"I suppose there are no such things as Protestant convents, or sisterhoods," she went on, "that receive poor creatures who have no longer any place in this world?"

"Not to my knowledge," sharply replied Mr. Cleveland, as he jumped off the stile. "It is time we went home, Adela."

They walked away side by side. Gaining the Rectory—a large, straggling, red-brick building, its old walls covered with time-honoured ivy—Adela ascended to her chamber, and shut herself in with her grief. She was wondering whether any other living woman could have entailed upon herself so much unhappiness, had blighted her life as she had blighted hers. Put away from her husband! Put away from him for ever and for ever!

How he must despise her!—despise her for her past shame and sin! despise her in her present contemptible humiliation! she reflected, a low moan escaping her,—he so pure and upright in all his ways, so good and generous and noble! Oh that she could hide to the end, from him and from the world!

Lifting her trembling hands and her despairing face, Adela breathed a faint petition that the Most High would be pleased to vouchsafe to her somewhat of His heavenly comfort, or else take her out of the tribulation that she could so little battle with.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN ALARM.

It was a few days later. Mrs. Oscar Dalrymple, who had been spending the afternoon with her mother and Mary Lynn, was preparing to return to the Grange. Alice had just come home again, a bright colour on her hectic cheeks, but weaker, as it seemed to them all. Alice was happier than she had been for years, in her sweet unselfishness. The trouble which had divided Colonel Hope and his nephew was at an end; Gerard had been reinstated in his uncle's favour, and was to marry Frances Chenevix. Lying on the sofa by the window, in the fading light, Alice had been giving them various particulars of this, and Selina, greatly interested, lingered longer than she had intended. But she had to go.

Jumping up hurriedly, she began to put on her bonnet and cloak. Mrs. Dalrymple rang the bell. It was to tell Reuben to be in readiness to attend her daughter.

"As if I wanted old Reuben with me, mamma!" exclaimed Selina. "Why, I shall run home in no time!"

"He had better be with you," sighed Mrs. Dalrymple: the sigh given to the disturbed state of things abroad. "The neighbourhood is not very quiet to-day, as you know, Selina, and it is getting dusk."

It was not quiet at all. The summary process, eviction, had been resorted to by Pinnett, as regarded the tenants of the Mill Cottages. He had forced them out with violence. One of them, named Thoms, had resisted to the last. Go out he would not, and the assailants could not get him out.

A meeting was to be held this same evening at Farmer Lee's. It could not be called a secret meeting; the farmer would have disdained the name; but those about to attend it waited until the dusk should shelter them, conscious that they were likely to speak treason against their landlord.

"Thoms is out," cried Farmer Bumford, as he entered Mr. Lee's house, in excitement.

"*Out!* How did they get him out?"

"Unroofed him, Lee. Pulled his place to pieces bit by bit, and so forced him out. He is now with the rest of the unfortunate lot."

"I thought such practices were confined to Ireland," said the honest farmer. "It's time something was done to protect us. Oscar Dalrymple will have his sins to answer for."

It was at this hour, when the twilight of the autumn evening was deepening, that Selina started for home. She chose the way by the common: a longer way, and in other respects not so desirable to-night. Selina's spirit was fearless enough, and she wanted to see whether the rumour could be true—that the unhappy people, just ejected, had collected there, meaning to encamp on it. Reuben, with the licence of an old and faithful servant, remonstrated, begging her to go home by the turnpike road: but Selina chose to cross the common.

Surely enough, the unfortunate lot, as Mr. Bumford called them, had gathered there on its outskirts, in view of their late homes, their poor goods and chattels, much damaged in the mêlée, piled in little heaps around them. Men, their hearts panting for revenge, sobbing and moaning women and shivering children, there they stood, or sat, or lay about. The farmers, Lee and Bumford, would later on open their barns to them for the night; but at present they expected to encamp here, under the stars.

In the midst of the harsh converse that prevailed, the oaths, and the abuse lavished on Oscar Dalrymple—for these poor, ignorant labourers refused, like their betters, to believe that Pinnett could so act without the landlord's orders—they espied, hurrying past them at a swift pace, their landlord's wife. Selina walked with her head down; now that she saw the threatening aspect of affairs, she wished she had listened to Reuben, and taken the open road. One of them came running up; a resolute fellow, named Dyke.

"You'd hurry by, would you?" said he, in a tone that spoke more of plaint than threat. "Won't you turn your eyes once, to the ruin your husband has wrought? Look at the mud and mortar! If the walls warn't of new brick or costly stone, they was good enough for us. They were our homes. Look at the spot now!"

Selina trembled visibly. She was aware of the awful feeling abroad against her husband, and a dread rushed into her heart that they might be going to visit it on her. Would they ill-use her?—kill her?

Reuben spoke up: but he was powerless against so many, and he knew it; therefore his tone was more conciliating than it would otherwise have been.

"What do you mean by molesting this lady? Stand away, Dyke, and let her pass. You wouldn't hurt her: if she is Mr. Dalrymple's wife she was the Squire's daughter, and *he* was always good to you."

"Stand away yourself, old man; who said we were going to hurt her?" roughly retorted Dyke. "'Taint likely; and you've said the reason why. Ma'am, do you see these ruins? Do they make you blush?"

"I am very sorry to see them, Dyke," answered Selina. "It is no fault of mine."

"Is it hard upon us, or not, that we should be turned out of the poor roofs that sheltered us? We paid our bit of rent, all on us; not one was a defaulter. How would you like to be turned out of your home, and told the poorhouse was afore you and an order for it, if you liked to go there?"

"I can only say how very sorry I am," she returned, distressed as well as terrified. "I wish I could help you and put you into better cottages to-morrow! But I am as powerless as you are."

"Will you tell *him* to do it—the master? We are coming up to ask him. Will you tell him to come out and face us, and look at them ruins, and look at *us;* at our wives and little ones shivering there in the cold?"

Selina seemed to be shivering as much as they were. "It is Pinnett who has done it," she said, "not Mr. Dalrymple. You should lay the blame on him."

"Pinnett!" roared Dyke, throwing his arm before the other men, now surrounding them, to stop their murmurings, for he thought his own speech the best. "Would Pinnett have dared to do this without the master's orders? Pinnett's a tool in his hands. Say to him, ma'am, please, that we are not going to stand Pinnett's doings and be quiet; we'll drown him first, let us once catch hold on him; and we be coming up to the Grange ourselves to say so to the master."

Finding she was to be no further detained, Selina sped on to the Grange. Oscar was in the oak parlour. She threw herself into a chair and burst into tears.

"Oscar, I have been so terrified. As I came by the common, with Reuben, the men were there, and ——"

"What men?" interrupted Mr. Dalrymple.

"Those who have been ejected from the cottages. They stopped me, and began to speak about their wrongs."

"Their—*wrongs*—did they say?"

"Yes, and I must say it also," she firmly answered, induced by fright and excitement to remonstrate against the injustice she had hitherto not liked to interfere with. "Cruel wrongs. Oscar, if you go on like this, oppressing all on the estate, you will be murdered as sure as you live. They are threatening to drown Pinnett if they can get hold of him; and they do not lay the blame on Pinnett, except as your agent, but on you."

"Pinnett is not my agent. What Pinnett does, he does on his own score. As to these harsh measures—as they are called—my sanction of them was not asked."

"But the poor men cannot see it in that light, Oscar, cannot be brought to believe it," she returned, the tears running down her cheeks. "It does seem so impossible to believe that Pinnett can be allowed to ——"

"There, that's enough," interrupted Oscar. "Let it end."

"Yes, but the trouble won't end, Oscar. And the men say they are coming up here. There's a meeting, too, at Lee's to-night."

"They can come if they please, and hold as many meetings as they please," equably observed Oscar. "Men who are living in a state of semi-rebellion must learn a wholesome lesson."

"They have been provoked to it. They were never rebellious in papa's time."

He made no reply. Selina, her feelings strongly excited, her sympathies bubbling up, continued.

"It will be cruel to the farmers if you turn them from their farms; it is doubly cruel to have forced these poor men from their cottages. They paid their rent. You should see the miserable wives and children, huddling together on the common. I could not have acted so, Oscar, if I had not a shilling in the world."

Mr. Dalrymple wheeled round his chair to face his wife. "Whose cruel conduct has been the original cause of it?" he asked in his cold voice, that to her sounded worse than another man's anger. "Who got into secret debt, to the tune of some seven or eight thousand pounds—ay, nearer ten thousand, counting expenses—and let the bills come in to me?"

She dropped her eyes then, for his reproach was true.

"And forced me to retrench, almost to starvation, and to exact the last farthing that the estate will yield, to keep me from a prison? Was it you, or I, Mrs. Dalrymple?"

"But things need not be made quite so bad," she took courage to say in a timid tone; "you need not proceed to these great extremes."

"Your father's system was one of indulgence; mine is not, and the tenants, large and small, don't know what to make of it. As to Pinnett, he does not consider himself responsible to me for his actions; and I—I cannot interfere with them. So long as I am a poor man, struggling to pay your debts, Selina, so long must Pinnett take his own course."

Oscar turned back again, caught up the book he had laid down, and went on reading it. Selina took a seat on the other side the table, and sat supporting her head with her hands. She wished things were not so wretchedly uncomfortable, or that some fairy would endow her with a good fortune.

Suddenly a tramp of feet arose outside the house. Oscar heard it, unmoved; Selina did not hear it, or she might have flown sooner to bar and bolt the doors. Before she could effect this, the malcontents of the common were in the hall, their numbers considerably augmented. It looked a formidable invasion. Was it murder they intended, or arson?——what was it not? Selina, in her terror, flew to the top of the house, and a servant maid flew after her: they both, with one accord, seized upon a rope, and the great alarm-bell boomed out from the Grange.

Up came the people from far and near; up came the fire-engines, from the station close by, and felt exceedingly aggrieved at finding no fire: the farmers, disturbed in the midst of their pipes and ale, rushed up from Mr. Lee's. It was nothing but commotion. Old Mrs. Dalrymple, terrified nearly to death at the alarm-bell, hastened to the scene, Mary Lynn with her, and Reuben running behind them.

Contention, prolonged and bitter, was going on in the hall. Oscar Dalrymple at one end, listening, and not impatiently, to his unwelcome visitors, who would insist upon being heard at length. He answered them calmly and civilly, not exasperating them in any way, but he gave no hope of a change in the existing policy.

After seeing his mistress seated in the hall, for she insisted on making one of the audience, poor Reuben, grieved to the heart at the aspect of affairs altogether, went outside the house, and paced about in the moonlight. It was a fine night. He had strolled near the stables, when he was accosted by some one who stood aloof, under the shade of their side wall.

"What's the matter here, that people should be running, in this way, into the Grange?"

"I should call it something like a rise," answered Reuben, sorrowfully. "Are you a stranger, sir?"

"I am a stranger. Until this night I have not been in the neighbourhood for years. But I formerly was on intimate terms with the Dalrymple family, and have stayed here with them for weeks together."

"Have you now, though!" cried Reuben. "In the Squire's time, sir?"

"In the Squire's time. I remember you, I think. Reuben."

"Ay, I am Reuben, sir. Sad changes have taken place since then. My old master's gone, and Mr. Robert is gone, and the Grange is now Oscar Dalrymple's."

"I knew of Mr. Dalrymple's death. What became of his son?"

"He soon followed his father. It will not do to talk of, sir."

"Do you mean that he died?" returned the stranger. But before Reuben could answer, Mr. Lee came up, and commenced a warm comment on the night's work.

"I hope there'll be no bloodshed," said he, "we don't want that; but the men are growing more excited, and Mr. Dalrymple has sent off a private messenger to the police station."

"This gentleman used to know the family," interposed Reuben; "he has come to the place to-night for the first time for years. It's a fine welcome for him, this riot."

"I was asking some particulars of what has transpired since my absence," explained the stranger. "I have been out of England, and now thought to renew my acquaintance with the family. What did Robert Dalrymple die of? I knew him well."

"He fell into trouble, sir," answered Reuben. "A random, wicked London set got hold of him, fleeced and ruined him, and he could not bear up against it."

"Died of it?" questioned the stranger.

"He killed himself," said Mr. Lee, in a low tone. "Threw himself into the Thames from one of the London bridges, and was drowned."

"How deplorable! And so the Grange passed to Oscar Dalrymple?"

"Yes," said the farmer. "He married the elder of the young ladies, Selina. And something not pleasant arose with them. They went to London, and there she ran very deeply into debt. Her husband brought her back to the Grange; and since then he has been an awful landlord, grinding us all down to powder. Things have come to such a pass now that we expect a riot. The poor labourers who tenanted the Mill Cottages have been ejected to-day; they have come up to have it out with Oscar Dalrymple, leaving their families and chairs and tables on the common. One of them, Thoms, could not be forced out, so they just took his roof off and his doors out."

The stranger seemed painfully surprised. "I never thought to hear this of a Dalrymple!"

But here Reuben interposed. Jealous for the name, even though borne by Oscar, he told of the leasing of the estate to Pinnett, and that it was he, not Oscar, who was proceeding to these cruel extremities.

"I should call that so much nonsense," said the stranger. "Lease the estate! that has a curious sound. Has he leased away all power over it? One cannot believe that."

"No, and we don't believe it," said the farmer; "not one of us, Mr. Dalrymple can't make us, though he tries hard to do so. He is playing Old Nick over us, sir, and nothing else. It was a fatal night for us that took Mr. Robert."

"You would have been better off under him, you think?"

"Think!" indignantly retorted the farmer. "You could not have known Robert Dalrymple, to ask it."

"Robert Dalrymple died in debt, I take it. Did he owe much in this neighbourhood?"

"Nothing here."

"Did he owe you anything?"

"Me!" cried the farmer. "Not he. Why, only a day before his death I had sent five hundred pounds to him to invest for me. He had not time to do it himself, but a gentleman who took a great deal of interest in Mr. Robert, and saw to his affairs afterwards, did it."

"What gentleman was that?"

"It was Mr. Grubb: he is Sir Francis Netherleigh now, and has come into Court Netherleigh. His sister—who is at the Grange to-night with old Mrs. Dalrymple—and Mr. Robert were to have been married."

"Robert Dalrymple may not be dead," abruptly spoke the stranger.

But this hypothesis was received with disfavour; not to say scorn. The stranger maintained his opinion, saying that it *was* his opinion.

"Then perhaps you'll enjoy your opinion in private," rebuked Mr. Lee. "To talk in that senseless manner only makes us feel the fact of his death more sharply."

"What if I tell you I met him abroad, only a year ago?"

There was a dead pause. Reuben breathed heavily. "Oh, don't play with us!" he cried out; "if my dear young master's alive, let me know it. But he cannot be alive," he added mournfully: "he would have made it known to us before now."

The stranger unwound a shawl-handkerchief, in which his voice and chin had been muffled, raised his soft round hat from his brows, and advanced from the shade cast by the stable wall, into the moonlight.

"Reuben! John Lee! do I look anything like him?"

Reuben sank on his knees, too faint to support himself in the overwhelming surprise and joy. For it was indeed his young master, Robert Dalrymple, raised, as it seemed, from a many years' grave. The old servant sobbed like a child.

"It is nothing less than magic," cried the farmer, when he had wrung Robert's hand as if he would wring it off, and both he and Reuben had had time to take in the full truth of the revelation. "Dead—yet living!"

"I never was dead," said Robert. "The night that I found myself irretrievably ruined ——"

But here Robert Dalrymple's explanation was interrupted by a noise. The malcontents, driven wild by Oscar's cold equanimity, which they took to be purely supercilious, were rushing out of the Grange by the front entrance, fierce threats and oaths pouring from their lips.

Oscar Dalrymple might go to perdition. They'd fire the place over his head, commencing with the barns and out-houses.

"Stay, stay, stay! let me have a few words with you before you begin," spoke one, meeting them with assured but kind authority—and his calm voice acted like oil poured upon troubled waters.

It was Sir Francis Netherleigh. Hearing of the riot, he had hastened up. He reasoned with the men, promised to see what *he* could do to get their wrongs redressed, and told them that certain barns and out-houses of his were being warmed and made comfortable for them for the night, and their wives and children were already on their way to take possession. Finally, he subdued them to peace and good temper.

But while this was taking place in front of the house there had been another bit of by-play near the stables. Mary Lynn, terrified for the effect of the riotous threats on Mrs. Dalrymple in her precarious state of health, begged her to return home, and ran out to look for Reuben. Mr. Lee discerned her leaning over the gate of the kitchen-garden, gazing about on all sides in the moonlight. A bright idea struck him, quite a little bit of romance.

"I'll fetch her to you here, Mr. Robert," he said. "I'll break the glad news to her carefully. And—*you* won't turn us out of our homes, will you, sir?" he lingered to say.

"That I certainly will not; and those who are already out shall go back again. But," added Robert, smiling, "I fear I shall be obliged to turn somebody out of the Grange."

"There's Pinnett, sir," came the next doubting remark. "If Mr. Oscar Dalrymple has leased him the estate, who knows but the law may give him full power over us——"

"Leased him the estate!" interposed Robert. "Why, my good friend, it was not Oscar Dalrymple's to lease: it was mine. Be at rest."

Relieved at heart, the farmer marched up to Mary; managing, despite the most ingenious intentions, to startle and confuse her. He opened the conference by telling her, with an uncomfortably mysterious air, that a dead man had come to life again who was waiting to see her: and Mary's thoughts, greatly disturbed, flew to a poor labourer who had died, really died, that morning.

"Why, what do you mean, Mr. Lee?" she interrupted with some awe. "You *can't* know what you are saying. Colter come to life again!"

"There! I know how I always bungle over this sort o' thing," cried the abashed farmer. "You must just forgive me. And you can well afford to, Miss Mary, for it's not Colter come to life at all; it is young Mr. Robert Dalrymple.—And here he is, walking towards you."

The farmer discreetly disappeared. Mary staggered into the shade

and stood for support against the trunk of the great elm tree. Robert drew her from it to the shelter of his faithful heart.

"Yes, it is I, my darling; I, myself—do not tremble so," he whispered. "God has been very merciful to me, more merciful than I deserved, and has brought me back to you and to home again."

She lay there, on his breast, the strong arms around her that would henceforth be her shelter through life.

(To be concluded.)

A TABLEAU.

THRONED; crimson robes around her; a crown of regal splendour
On her lofty head; all furniture of pomp and state complete;
One jewelled hand stretched forward to touch the bended shoulder
Of the courtly squire low kneeling in reverence at her feet.

To touch with gleaming sword-blade the velvet of his doublet,
Ere she utter the command that raises him her knight:
So the drawn-back curtain shows her, a haughty queen of beauty,
And dazzled eyes look on and smile approval of the sight.

"Were the picture real!" she whispers down in her heart's close chamber.
"Were the picture real!" he echoes, in his wounded love's despair.
"Were I a queen indeed," she sighs, "and he my humble servant,
What joy to stoop and lift him up my sovereignty to share!"

"Were I her favoured page in truth, to whom she granted knighthood
Were she above and I below, I might not woo in vain.
Ah! prouder than the proudest queen, she will not wear a favour;
Meets all pleading from a higher stand with passionless disdain."

The curtain now is drawn again across the gorgeous tableau;
The queen unclasps her jewels, and lays crown and robes aside;
The knight throws off his cloak; and, while applause rings to the ceiling,
The mirage fades for ever in the desert land of pride.

EMMA RHODES.

MRS. SIDDONS.

EVEN at this day it is almost impossible to pronounce the name of Mrs. Siddons without a certain thrill, which runs through us from heart to brain, as indistinct shapes of horror, and wonder, and mystery rise up around us. We tremble as the shadowy crowd of pale phantoms grows thicker and thicker, and wonder what manner of woman she could have been who, after the lapse of more than half a century, still, in the mere kingdom of fancy and memory, possesses such a spell over us. And yet this mighty enchantress has the simplest and most womanly of stories, for her transcendent genius went hand-in-hand with the most simple and womanly of natures. These facts will stand out very clearly before us as we follow the course of her long life.

In 1755 a country manager, named Roger Kemble, was making for himself a small, laboriously earned, local celebrity, and a laboriously earned competency, by the conscientious way in which he carried out his theatrical engagements, and by the respectable regularity of the life led by himself and his family—a thing not too common among people of their position and profession in those days. The worthy man had good reasons for perseverance and industry in his calling—reasons which were very fully impressed upon him by the cry of a new baby sounding yearly in his nursery. But he bravely struggled on through home worries and professional annoyances—struggled on, most faithfully and firmly helped in everything by his true-hearted, strong-spirited wife; and found an average share of light and shadow in his career. It was in 1755, when the steady activity of Mr. and Mrs. Roger Kemble was at its full height, that their daughter, Sarah Kemble, the tragic muse that was to be, was born.

The details of home life and the details of theatrical life jostled each other round little Sarah Kemble's cradle, so that it grew natural to her, before she could reason upon the subject, to think of the two as making up one harmonious whole. Thus it was easier for her in after days, than it, perhaps, would be to many women, to be a model wife and mother while she was a queen in dramatic art. The little girl had a mind that was, by nature, an early opening blossom; and the sort of talk which daily went on around her, and the sort of training that she received, helped the fair flower yet quicker to unfold.

Theatrical talent seemed to come to her naturally, and as a matter of course. She began to act almost before she began to speak and to walk. Her parents were well pleased with the small, bright wonder, as it developed before their eyes, and gave her intellect every facility

for following its native bent. But they watched lovingly over her character, and preserved it, as far as was possible in those days for people in their position, from becoming frayed and soiled with too early contact with the hard realities of the world. They were fully resolved that she should be an actress. And, in truth, she seemed created for the profession, and so they let her, while still scarcely out of the nursery, take many small, childish parts on the stage of her father's theatre.

Sarah seems to have taken the matter in an extremely simple, commonplace way. Her father acted; her mother, though she may have seldom appeared on the stage, was always talking about acting. The ladies and gentlemen who went in and out of her home, and chatted to her, and played with her, acted. Her little brother, John, was already beginning to act in his frocks and pinafores. In truth, it seemed to Sarah a more ordinary thing to act and be gazed at by an admiring public, than it does to most children to beg for sweets and toys. She did not see that her attainments were anything to be so very proud of—they were so common and general among her surroundings. And so, born, as she was, to the trade, she passed through the trying ordeal almost unscathed.

Sarah Kemble's first marked success was when, at the age of thirteen, she played Ariel. She darted hither and thither about the stage with such airy grace—there was something so sprite-like in her free, wavy swiftness of motion, she seemed so entirely to be a creature born of the loves of a breeze and a sunbeam, that the whole audience broke into frantic applause at the end of the play, and her proud, happy father began dimly to foresee his daughter's future. After that, as she glided from childhood into early womanhood, she continued to take more or less difficult parts in Roger Kemble's theatre; so that the light and melody of the poets' highest and sweetest conceptions grew, as it were, into her young being, until they became like part of herself. Yet, all this while, she was by no means kept by her parents shut out from the most commonplace, every-day, trivial matters. She was taught to help her mother in the household work, and would go gaily from a rehearsal to the making of a pudding, or the darning of a pair of stockings. No doubt it was this free, constant mixing in the simple family life of her home that gave so healthy a balance to her mind, and kept wild discords out of her character.

Thus time went on till Sarah Kemble had reached the age of 18. Her figure had developed into Juno-like majesty, her handsome face had power printed in its every feature, from the wonderful, lustrous eyes, down to the subtle changes of expression about the finely chiselled lips; her depth and breadth of talent in her art was daily showing itself more and more remarkable. No wonder, then, that her parents had very brilliant dreams about the future of their gifted daughter. If she went to London and made a successful début there,

who could tell that a peer of the realm might not be sufficiently smitten with her charms to lay a coronet at her feet?

Such being the cherished visions of the worthy Kemble couple concerning their beautiful, talented girl, it was, certainly, a somewhat severe trial for them to find out that Sarah had already given away her heart. The favoured cavalier was, if truth must be told, no cavalier at all, except when, sometimes, he appeared on the stage in helm and plume not always of the newest. He was a young actor called Siddons, with a good-looking face, and a frank, kindly temper, and a warm heart, but endowed with no striking professional ability or intellectual force. Sarah's imagination, however, chose to make him co her hero, and not all the opposition of her parents to such a nnection for her could make her give up her lover. For some time Mr. and Mrs. Kemble persisted in their vain efforts to

"Bind a flame with flaxen band,"

but the young actress was no coquette; nothing, all her life through, was farther than that from her nature; her plighted troth was not a thing to be thrown on and off like a stage head-dress. One fine morning, therefore, the father and mother were made very plainly aware of the folly of their endeavours by the news that Sarah had taken matters into her own hands, and was already Mrs. Siddons.

Sarah Siddons found that she had made no mistake in the step she had taken. The man whom she had chosen was a man to whom a woman might safely entrust her happiness, and throughout the whole of her long married life the fire on the household altar of the pair continued to burn with a calm, steady light. Mr. Siddons, it is true, never attained to making any name for himself individually; throughout his story he was only known as the husband of Mrs. Siddons; but he was a man of honour and of heart, and with this his wife was fully content. She was as true to him as steel. Though her admirers and would-be lovers were legion, not a single man of that day, when the full noontide of her fame was blazing down upon her, could boast the faintest shadow of a liaison with the tragic muse.

The home of the young actress was a home full of quiet sunshine; her first baby was smiling on her knee, her parents had whispered a word of forgiveness. So young a grandmother was Mrs. Roger Kemble, that when she took her first grandchild in her arms she had a little son of her own trotting at her side, the Charles Kemble of after days. No wonder that she soon melted into a soft dew of tears at Sarah's prayer for pardon. Yes, it was a home of quiet sunshine, but naturally enough it was a home where money was not too abundant. Young Mrs. Siddons, the girl wife and mother, began to see that earnest work at her profession would be needful to keep the little domestic bark afloat, and the knowledge of this, no doubt, first fully aroused her genius, and that quality which, all her life, went hand-in-hand with it—her unwearying, exhaustless diligence in her art.

She got an engagement in the theatre at Cheltenham, and there

her name as an actress gained its first wide celebrity. In those days Cheltenham was the most favourite resort in England for languid fashion that did not know what to do with itself, and so made an employment out of supposed illness. A new star in the theatrical world was a real treasure to the tongue of the behooped belles and befrilled dandies, who really could not find scandal enough to occupy their talk from sunrise to sunset. No doubt Mrs. Siddons, the hard-working actress, who had, in reality, so little in her that was akin to her Cheltenham audience, became more quickly famous in a place like this than she would have done anywhere else.

Tidings of the young actress's success spread, in time, from Cheltenham to London. Garrick, who was then manager of Drury Lane, heard of her, and wrote to engage her for the next London season. We can fancy how her heart beat and her cheek flushed with pride, when that letter came from the acknowledged high-priest of dramatic art of the eighteenth century. She was, of course, ready at once to obey the great man's summons. She was full of hopes and fears, as was but natural for a young artist in her position, and yet her consciousness of genius upheld her, as on a strong pinion. Her first appearance before a London audience was at Drury Lane, as "Isabella," in Southerne's play of "The Fatal Marriage," and throughout that season she continued to act in different parts at that same theatre.

Though she was allowed on all sides to be a young actress of great promise, she does not seem, at this period, to have become an especial favourite with the London public. Her genius had probably, as yet, not reached quite its full stature; she had still something to learn in her art. Besides, in those days, London playgoers were very fastidious, and were more ready to cling to old pets, than to receive new ones; it was, in general, a slow process finding the way into their good graces. As for Garrick, who might have given the young actress such a strong, helping hand, a touch of jealousy seems to have made him cold towards her; his only recorded remark concerning her is, that she waved about her arms so much on the stage that he always feared she would knock off his wig. The prescient soul of the great actor may have dimly foreseen that this young woman was soon to ascend the throne which he was just about to abdicate; the throne on which he had sat so gloriously; and he may have shrunk a little, as many of us in his place would doubtless have shrunk, at the presage of the cry which would shortly be ringing through the theatrical and intellectual world, "Le roi est mort, vive la reine!"

Mrs. Siddons was somewhat disappointed with the result of her first London season. The feeling was natural; but though she was disappointed, she was not cast down. She never for a moment relaxed in her brave efforts in her art; she knew that her genius was there; and she went on in calm, patient hope, fully determined that, though a London audience did not just at present seem to value

her very much, they should one day prize her as a most precious jewel in the national crown. She left London, and found, easily, various engagements at York and other towns in the provinces, her reputation increasing rapidly, her grasp of art growing more and more firm. Hers was no feeble spark of talent that could be extinguished by a partial want of success.

Sheridan had now taken Garrick's place as manager of Drury Lane. Reports that flew up from the country on busy wings and hovered about the theatre, told how Mrs. Siddons was winning for herself a fresh blossom in her wreath of fame wherever she went. The new manager thought that he could not do better than recall her to fill her old situation; he had formerly seen her act, and had conceived a very high idea of her powers. She came back willingly, yet a little proudly too; she was longing to charm and subjugate the highest audience in the land, but she did not choose to let them know it too plainly. From that time forward her popularity in London grew brighter and brighter, and more and more extensive, until her genius received its full tribute of homage, and she was acknowledged at once by the aristocracy, of rank, of wealth, and of intellect, to be the greatest tragic actress that had ever trod an English stage, that ever interpreted the heart and mind of Shakespeare.

Mrs. Siddons' highest triumph was her Lady Macbeth. Her conception of the character was at once so passionate and so delicate, so instinct with the transfiguring fire of genius, yet so full of the most vivid reality, that her audience, as it looked and listened, were completely carried away from the theatre in the middle of London in the eighteenth century, to tremble and weep in the old Scottish palace of the north. It seemed no mimic scene of horror and of woe; it was surely a terrible bit of real, human life. She herself entirely lost her own identity in the character for the time, as indeed she did in all the various people that she represented on the stage. The following incident, belonging to this period of her story, shows how completely she threw herself into the creations of the poet's fancy, to which her splendid genius gave living, breathing shape.

Late one night Mr. Siddons was sitting by the fire in the modest family parlour, which, in that most unassuming household, served as dining-room or drawing-room, as the case might be. He was smoking calmly his last pipe, and beginning to think about going to bed, whither, as this was not one of her evenings at the theatre, he believed his wife had gone already. The house was sunk in dreamy silence, so was the quiet street outside; silence only broken, now and then, by the roll of distant wheels. The actor had been drawing a vague picture of a little holiday trip which he and Sarah would take next summer, and had fallen into a half doze, in which he was driving down a country lane all scented with honeysuckle, all draped with eglantine. Suddenly he was roused, with a start, by hurried footsteps, that were flying rather than running down the passage.

Who could it be? he asked himself, all in a maze and a wonder, as he jumped up and rubbed his sleep-laden eyes. He had hardly had time to let the question go darting through his brain, when the door of the room was flung open quickly, as by a hasty, trembling hand, and a female figure rushed in.

Mr. Siddons gazed in speechless astonishment, not unmixed with a touch of fear. There before him stood his wife, her fine hair dishevelled, her dress all in disorder, her face all quivering with strong emotion. In bewildered alarm he asked her what was the matter, but her only answer was to throw herself into his arms, and burst into a torrent of tears. He soothed her tenderly, not knowing what to think, and gradually she grew calmer. Then her words made the mystery plain enough. Instead of going to bed, as he had bade her do, she had been sitting up studying her part as Lady Macbeth ; and the character had so completely absorbed her in itself, she had so entirely realized the horror of each situation in the play, had seen it all so distinctly before her eyes, as if she had been there in the body, that a wild, unreasoning terror had seized her, and she had rushed away to seek human companionship.

What shapes of fame and glory go in and out in the living picture of Mrs. Siddons' life at this period—the period when she stood at the very top of the ladder of celebrity and popularity as an actress—when her genius was fully acknowledged on every side, and all the intellect, all the greatness of the land gathered round her to do her honour. One evening we see her reading Milton aloud to an assembly where talent and beauty are as plentiful on every side as flowers in the hedgerows in May ; and, as she ceases, what a wondrous face that is which is bending over her—a face so full of fiery power, yet a face which can be like a rippling brook in the sunshine in its soft mobility of expression when this man speaks sweet words to a woman, or plays with a child. We do not marvel that his face can sway a great nation's senate as easily as the wind does the trees of a mighty forest. As we hear its rich, melodious tones repeat, in the great actress's ear, as she closes her book, the lines beginning with the words, "The angel ceased," no wonder that even she, used as she is to incense, blushes a little with pleasure at such a compliment from the lips of Edmund Burke.

Next we find the daughter of the country manager entering no less a place than the palace of royalty itself. A prim little figure, with an air of grave importance, which sits almost comically upon it, yet with a whole world of meaning in the plain, interesting face, is receiving her with a dainty, yet elaborate curtsey. Of course Fanny Burney, the quondam authoress, the now maid of honour, is the only person in the not very literary household of their Majesties, King George and Queen Charlotte, competent to be the companion of Mrs. Siddons.

What a tinkle of laughter, what a dancing and tripping of merry

words off a most nimble tongue; what a flashing, and twinkling, and gleaming of wit there is to-day at the table in the actress's modest dwelling! We should have thought such a brilliant guest would have sought far more richly furnished boards to shine at. We should have thought that the tragic muse could hardly brook such gay, airy talk; but Sheridan can glitter when and where he pleases, and Mrs. Siddons can be as full of mirth as a very school-girl when he, her old friend, is at her side.

Yet though her life was thus girdled about with observance and worship from the highest in the land, though her mind and imagination were always employed in realizing the most glorious creations of the most glorious poets, Mrs. Siddons, in her home, was at once the simplest and the tenderest of women. She did a great deal of the household work herself; and her grand friends, when they called, would be met by her with a flat-iron in her hand, or would find her seated, studying a new part, while, at the same time, she rocked the cradle of her latest born, and knitted her husband's stockings. When she went to the theatre she was generally accompanied by one or more of her children, and the little things would cling about her, holding her hand or her dress, as she stood in the side scenes. The fine ladies, who petted her, could not put one grain of their fine-ladyism into her. To the end of her life she remained a triumphant proof of the not too generally believed fact that an artist woman can be, at the same time, a most purely domestic woman.

Mrs. Siddons was a woman of high principle, and deep religious feeling and practice. The breath of scandal never even dared to touch her name. She was true to every duty. Her chief fault was a certain too warm love of money; but the straitened circumstances in which her married life began, may, perhaps, form some excuse for such a failing.

Mrs. Siddons' last appearance on the stage was at the age of sixty-one, at her brother Charles's benefit. After that she withdrew entirely into private life. Her old age was full of calm and honour, though, perhaps, she may have missed a little the excitement of her earlier life; but there have been few more radiant sunsets than hers when, at length, she sank into eternal rest.

ALICE KING.

THE WHITE WOMAN OF SLAITH

By Mrs. G. Linnæus Banks.

I.

SUPERSTITION dies hard, and who shall say that when Superstition dies, his twin sister, Veneration, will not droop and languish over his bier? But nowhere does superstition linger longer than among the fisher-folk of the far north. The men who "go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters," not only "see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep," but they leave behind them ashore women sensitive as barometers to every change of wind or weather, keenly susceptible of all that may affect the husbands and fathers and brothers who risk their lives that they and others may live. And they also leave behind them children to be influenced by all they hear and see, and to catch up and transmit every eerie whisper that may fall from their elders.

So from generation to generation the wind has had voices for the fisher-folk the trading townsman could not hear, and the wreathing mist has held shapes the city matron could not see: voices and shapes of awe and mystery, powerful to bless or ban.

Such may have been the "White Woman of the Wreck," of whom the hardy fisher-wives of Slaith to this day speak in undertones, lest the very utterance of her name should bring the ill-omened spirit amongst them.

Yet only once has she been seen within living memory, and a gray-haired woman keeps the record in her heart.

Far back, when this time and grief bowed Hilda Sanderson's grandfather was a boy, when the fishermen's huts were not perched here and there upon the rocks to be out of reach of the tide, but looked out from beneath the cliffs on a fair expanse of sand and shingle and a land-locked bay, was the White Woman seen for the first time, and *in the flesh.*

Rude and uncultivated as are the fisher-folk of Slaith in these our times, civilisation is yet making its mark on the young; but in those bygone days the dwellers on too many of our coasts looked upon all spoils of the ocean as their legitimate right. So at Slaith when a fierce north-easter ravaged the coast and kept yawls and cobles at home, the storm would bring as sure a harvest as was won from the deep on those moonlight nights when the herring-boats were out. And notwithstanding the abundance of coal in the wild region around, frequent wrecks made wood the common fuel: it was plentiful, and cost nothing but the gathering and stowing away.

Never had come storm to Slaith at once so productive, or so dis-

astrous, as that which spread its lurid banners over the sky one September evening more than a century ago, warning the busy fishermen to put back and haul their craft high and dry upon the beach for safety. Only one boat, which had set sail in advance of its fellows, disregarded the storm-signals of the sky and pursued its course, whether in recklessness or confidence is not known.

The purple clouds gathered over the crimson glare, the wind came howling up, driving blacker masses of cumuli before it, and night set prematurely in over land and sea.

The village, sheltered on the north and west by a steep, stern ironstone cliff which spread its protecting arm far out to sea in a formidable reef or "neb," was all astir. Men and women gathered on the beach intent on hauling up the boats, securing nets and tackle, and speculating what luck the sea had in store for them, as it broke in foam and froth on the hard rocks and ran in almost to their feet.

Yet, mingling with the crowd and these speculations, came one short-skirted fishwife to the beach with wildly anxious eyes, and hands pressed on her throbbing breast, for Robert Blackburn's boat had not come back with the rest, and it held her husband and her boys. Only the youngest clung to her woollen skirt, and added, with his questions, to her fears and agony.

As the waves leapt up to meet the vivid lightning darting from the clouds and dancing on their crests, she could discern through the blinding rain a disabled ship struggling amid the billows, and she felt how little hope there was for her husband's coble in a gale before which so large a vessel was driving to destruction.

Yes, driving helplessly on towards the Neb and never a boat or a hand put forth to the rescue, though the minute gun boomed in solemn appeal above the roar of the elements; though shrieks and cries for help were borne in by the wind as the doomed vessel was hurried nearer and nearer to its fate; and though the lightning flashes revealed the white figure of a woman lashed to the broken mainmast, and hapless sailors clinging to the bowsprit and rigging.

Nearer ran the ship to the outlying reef, and nearer to a crowd of stalwart men who knew the coast, were inured to danger, and lacked neither strength nor courage to risk life or limb in saving life—but only *the will*. True, the danger was imminent, the risk great, the men had families dependent on their lives, and—if none were left to tell the story of the wreck, better luck would be for the village. So cries and shrieks fell on deaf ears. Not even the piteous adjuration "For God's sake!" which came with strange distinctness across the waters as the vessel struck, had power to move a man. Maggy Blackburn ran from one to another beseeching pity for the lady and the helpless crew, as they might hope for aid in like straits, as *her* husband and sons might be needing aid even then!

Sullen silence, or gruff admonitions to mind her own business were

the only response. Even the women turned away, the greed of gain, the hope of spoil, stronger than womanhood.

Morning dawned on a cold, gray sky, a receding tide, a placid sea, a fishing village nestling under rugged cliffs, with a long reach of smooth sand between the cottages and the narrow strip of boulders and shingle, and the outstretched arm of the Neb, looking innocent as any other benevolent protector.

It dawned also on smoke uprising from cottage fires kept alive during all the storm and tumult; on a sea and beach strewn with wreckage; on men and women wading into the surf to bring ashore boxes and bales within reach of arms or boat-hooks; on boats, well manned, steering among the rocks and shallows, or even into deeper currents around the Neb, to pick up jetsam and flotsam before the coastguard or the lord of the manor should come on the scene with a legal claim.

It dawned on the half-naked bodies of drowned sailors swaying hither and thither with the undulating waves, or lying disfigured among the rocks, among weeds and tangle, and inquisitive lobsters black as undertakers. It dawned, too, on a tall, slim woman in a white clinging garment, her head and shoulders wrapped in a black shawl, from beneath which her fair hair had fluttered and lay in wet, loosened tresses on the sand, where the tide had landed her and the broken mast together. Landed only to lie there unnoted and unregarded, although when the sun kissed the pale lips and eyes they opened to the light and warmth, and perchance a hope of deliverance thrilled through the half-insensate form.

It came not until too late. Maggy Blackburn and her boy retreating to their hut when the ship struck, had spent the intervening hours in weeping for the dear ones they never expected to behold again: and not until the sun was fairly up, and the boy had cried himself to sleep, did she venture forth to see the devastation night and storm and pitiless men had to answer for.

Far along the beach, away from the busy knots of wreckers, she found the White Woman lying to all appearance dead. A compassionate tear fell on the pale upturned face, and a word or two of pity dropped from the rough fisherwife's lips—in her own grief sympathetic.

As she spoke, a pair of lovely blue eyes slowly unclosed and rested for an instant on her own in mute thanksgiving.

With a cry of surprise, Maggy strove to loosen the bonds which held the frail form to the mast. In vain! loving hands had tied them too securely, and the wetted cordage would not yield.

She had no knife. Rising to her feet she put her hands to her mouth and sent a loud halloo across the sands for help. Again and again she called. Her call was disregarded. A large cask was being rolled over the grating shingles.

At length an answer, prefaced by an oath, was shouted back.

"Mind thy own business, Maggy Blackburn, an' let th' woman be'

But Maggy, tender in the hour of her own dreaded bereavement, stooped to whisper, in ears which might or might not be conscious, the nature of her errand: and ignoring the belief that ill-luck follows the restoration of the shipwrecked to life, she sped along the sweep of sand to her own home for a knife, lest a churlish refusal might meet her on the beach, where knives were in active use.

Blackburn's cottage was mounted on a ledge of rock above the rest of the village, and was less accessible, and, though Maggy was strong and swift of foot, swifter-footed Death outran her. *He* had severed invisible cords, released the struggling spirit. It only remained for Maggy to release a stiffening corpse, bear it reverently beyond reach of the tide, and compose the dead limbs for burial, wofully wondering the while who would perform the like office for her Robert and his boys.

Intent on her melancholy occupation, absorbed in her own anguish, she heeded not the noisy group near the Neb quarrelling over their spoil, until a loud "Halloo" arrested her attention. Turning round, she saw a young fisherman's hand pointing seawards, and some instinct prompted her to fall on her knees with uplifted voice and hands. She felt rather than knew the distant sail for their own.

Robert Blackburn and his sons were safe, though their boat had sustained some damage. They had found a haven close at hand on the first outbreak of the tempest.

But what of the good ship that had gone to pieces on the Neb?

What the billows had spared the wreckers had industriously stowed away in secret caves and cellarage, till scarcely a spar remained afloat to tell the mournful story. And after the White Woman and the sailors washed ashore were buried in the sands there was rejoicing and carousal. "That was a lucky day for Slaith," they said, as they sat round fires supplied from the timber of the wreck; "drowned folk were not likely to dispute possession of their harvest, and no man living had put in a claim."

And as the "last lucky day" it was remembered and spoken of with regret as the winter nights drew in; and of all the good ships lost on our northern coasts not one went ashore at Slaith that had not sailed from it. No more luck of the kind came in their way. Even the take of fish grew scanty and precarious; and a rumour got about that a tall woman in a long white clinging robe, whose head was muffled in a black shawl, was sure to stand like a beacon on the uttermost point of the Neb whenever a storm was brewing, and with the motion of her white arms in the air warn approaching vessels of their danger; and that she had been seen to finger the nets as they hung outside the huts to dry, when they would break like tow and let the fish escape.

Certainly the nets were always under repair, and the boats; and

when the weird white figure was seen on the Neb, like a wreath of mist or spray, there would be apprehensive whispers in the village of the White Woman of the Wreck, and a sense of ill-luck spread its gloom and discontent over Slaith.

It made itself felt in envious antagonism to the Blackburns, who somehow seemed to prosper where others failed, and to be thriving better without a share of the great wreck's cargo than any of those whose cellars had been filled with her merchandise and stores. Silk had mildewed, casks had leaked, and fruits had been damaged by the sea-water.

"Nothing, however, seemed to go wrong with the Blackburns, was said with a grumble, not only at the firesides, but openly to Maggy and Robert both; and they were so often twitted with being "above their neighbours" in more than their dwelling, that as the ill-feeling spread, whilst the seasons went their round, the elder and younger Blackburns alike ceased to grumble at the extra distance and rugged path to their abode, since it kept them apart from ill neighbours.

A year had almost gone by since the day of the great wreck, when Robert Blackburn lamed his foot stumbling over a coil of cable on the beach, at the same time that his two upgrown sons lay tossing on their pillows in the burning arms of fever.

A sad and anxious week, this, for Maggy, watching her sick, with only Cuthbert, a lad of thirteen, to run to and from the distant apothecary, hew her wood, or draw her water.

His brothers had been three days in bed when he was sent in the early morning for water from the beck-spring. The village lay asleep at the foot of the rock; the boats, which had not been out overnight, were hauled up high on the beach—that beach which seemed to have narrowed so considerably; and a thick haze rested on the slightly heaving sea.

Something of this crossed the boy's mind as he came down the hill with his pail, and noted the high water-mark left by the receding tide.

Suddenly he beheld—as if she came out of the very mist—the White Woman of the Wreck glide over the sands and shingle, and touch the stern of every boat as she passed, with one omission—that of his father; and then, with a sweep of her long arm towards the line of cottages, glide away silently as she came, leaving Cuthbert so dazed he could scarcely find words to tell his mother what he had seen.

"Not a word to them inside!" she said, as she met him on the threshold. She too had seen the White Woman from her own door, and her heart sank lest Betty Rae's ill-savoured words should be true and their own luck indeed be on the turn. What if the omen should be to them, and her sons be taken from her?

Private forebodings did not, however, stifle her goodwill to others.

Cuthbert was despatched to the awakening village with the intelligence, and a word of advice for the men not to go to sea that day. Her messenger was greeted with incredulity and scorn. The Blackburns were not in favour, Maggy's motives were suspected, her story disbelieved.

"Are our wives to have empty creels because Maggy Blackburn's men-folk are laid by and canna work?" asked Peter Rae, the man who twelvemonths before had bade Maggy "Let the woman be!"

Cuthbert went back with a laugh ringing in his ears, and a hint that his mother had picked a convenient time for ghost-seeing.

Nevertheless, her message had not been wholly thrown away, however much her motive might be suspected. There was an absence of ordinary alacrity in preparing the boats for sea, and a disposition to talk rather than work. One old fisherman, with a weather-beaten face, whose name was Sanderson, declared that neither he nor his sons would put out to sea that day. "Better lose a take of fish than a' our lives, an' there's no kenning what mischief's afloat if th' White Woman *has* been seen."

There was a sneer at the Sandersons. Nevertheless, one or two young fellows held back at the last, and a yawl or two sailed without the full complement of hands—the Raes' for one.

It was a memorable day for Slaith.

When the sun reached its meridian, sea and sky were all aglow like molten gold, and the women on the shore, led by Betty Rae, laughed the stay-at-homes to scorn as they themselves went about their household ways panting with the unprecedented heat.

Maggy was thankful when a breeze came landward with the returning tide and through the open door to fan the flushed cheeks of fever; and not she only. But with the breeze came a little cloud out of the distant wave, and deepened and darkened and spread as the breeze swelled and mounted to a gale, and the long rollers of the advancing tide swept in on the shore, mounting higher and higher, and breaking on the Neb as though trying their strength on the rock and disputing its right to bar their progress.

The Sandersons said they saw the White Woman on the shore waving her long arms and beckoning to the waves. Calling all hands to help, they drew their own coble and the Blackburns' higher and higher up the beach, now alive with frightened fishwives wading in the surf to secure cables and tackle, nets and creels, hitherto supposed to lie beyond the highest tide.

But on came the rushing water, on and on as the daylight went, on and on in the darkness of night, white-lipped and roaring. Then there was a sudden stir within the cottages, as the water crawled in at the open doors and put out fires on the hearth.

A sudden stir, with glancing lanterns and flaring torches, to bear the infant and its cradle, the grandmother in her chair, and household goods anyhow up the rocky pathways to security; a stir all too

late and too hurried in the darkness to save all of life or property. The whole shore was invaded by the sea.

Morning broke on desolation. Weeping women and children up on the cliffs looked in vain for their homes down below. The village had been swept from the sands.

The two cobles had held to their moorings and were but little damaged; of the picturesquely grouped cottages only ruins mingled with weeds and tangle were visible. No four walls were standing that were not, like the Blackburns', perched on the cliff.

There ran at last a shuddering reminder through the shelterless crowd that it was the anniversary of the "great wreck," as Betty Rae was missed from their midst, and a bundle of blue and red that had once been a woman was found amidst the débris of the Raes' dwelling. And as hour after hour, and day after day went by, and never yawl or coble came back to tell the secrets of the night or of the devastating storm, the homeless women, whose orphaned children clung wailing to their skirts, in their own agony envied the lot of Maggy Blackburn, whose men-folk were spared to her. And not a few remembered that, of all the village, she alone had shown compassion towards the White Woman of the Wreck.

Slaith—the original Slaith—was gone; homes and people: and the White Woman was seen no more by *that* generation.

II.

A NEW Slaith arose. Not immediately, and not on the sands. In spring and autumn the sea had possession of the old site at flood-tide. Of the bereaved families who had found refuge in holes and caves among the rocks, some wandered inland; others, who had means or a man left, began to build cabins here and there on the irregular hill-side. Buxom or energetic widows attracted husbands from other stations on the coast. There were marriages and intermarriages, notably between the Blackburns and the Sandersons. Even Rae's only surviving son (the one who had stayed ashore), having wherewith to purchase a new boat—secret spoil of the great wreck—had not far to seek a wife, who scouted the suggestion of ill-luck.

The new village rose under other auspices. The patriarchs of Slaith would have no wreckers in their midst, the awful visitation of the White Woman of the Wreck serving as a deterrent so long as an eye-witness remained to verify the story he handed down to future generations.

So long as Cuthbert Blackburn, the last survivor of the great storm, sat in the chimney nook, and related to his listening grandchildren how, with his own young eyes, he had seen the white woman with the black shawl cut away from the broken mast to be buried; and how, a year after, to a day, he had beheld the shadowy form of the dead and buried woman glide over the sands, shake a threatening

hand at the village, and touch the stern of every foredoomed boat; the listening children would edge closer to each other, look fearfully around, and hold their breaths with awe.

And so long as the old man could totter about, with the wind playing amongst his grey locks, never a Blackburn or a Sanderson was known to bring other than a legitimate cargo ashore, although smuggling was openly connived at by people of note and respectability on the coast and inland.

But when the old grandfather was laid to rest, the White Woman might have been laid to rest also. She had lapsed into the airy region of tradition, and, in the daily duties and anxieties of fishermen's lives, the very awe her name had inspired was fast dying out. And no wonder. Seventy years had almost rounded their circuit since the sea made its obliterating inroad upon Slaith. Cuthbert's youngest grandchild, Hilda Sanderson, was a blooming maiden of eighteen—golden haired, fresh coloured, firm of foot, and round of limb—as ready to wade in the surf as a water nymph; and she carried on her shoulders the wicker fish creel, suspended by its strap across her forehead, with a grace peculiarly her own.

Eighteen. And nine years had gone since she, her grandfather's pet, had, for the last time, wandered with him on the shore, and drunk in his never-failing recital, as, with his stick, he pointed to the end of the Neb where the ship went down; marked out, as on a map, every detail of the scenes he had witnessed; and cautioned her, as she hoped to prosper, never to form a friendship or have any dealings with a Rae.

Eighteen—and the youngest representative of the Raes had come a wooing to her!

During his lifetime Cuthbert Blackburn's own children, in obedience to his behest, had held aloof from the Raes. But his grandchildren had felt his interdict a hardship; since avoidance of the Raes meant (to the lads at least) exclusion from companionship and from such sports and games as called for numbers, and of which one or other of the two Raes was almost sure to be leader.

Certainly Hilda's brothers held out the right hand of fellowship to Stephen Rae almost over their grandfather's grave, but surreptitiously, and no one at home was the wiser.

Hilda, seeing the lads together, put in a protest in memory of her grandfather, and their cousin, Robert Blackburn, set his face against the new friendship; but all to no purpose. He himself had, in time, to go with the stream or be left in a minority. And even Hilda, when she grew old enough and strong enough to be sent to the beck for water, was not sorry to find a stronger arm ready to carry the full pail down the hill in her stead.

The Blackburns' cottage no longer looked down from an elevation on the village. It now stood with the Sandersons', almost in the front rank, with a sea-wall as a protection at the edge of the rock

On a higher level the Raes had built, and their footpath to the beach skirted the tumbling mountain stream; and so it came about that, without design, Stephen was so often at hand to do her a service.

That he proffered his services might be due to her pretty face; that she accepted them might be set down as much to the careless, matter-of-fact, yet masterful manner in which he had possessed himself of her pail in the first instance, as to his black eyes and curly head.

He was five years her senior, and the girl of fifteen, taken by surprise, submitted with something akin to fear in her breast, following him down the steep path with an eerie misgiving of evil to come, and answering his few brief remarks with mere monosyllables. She scarcely said "Thank you" as he set down the pail almost at her own door, and, without waiting even for those curt thanks, proceeded on his way to the beach with a net over his shoulder, whistling as he went.

His shadow darkened the cottage window as he stooped to set down the pail.

"Who was that?" asked Maggy Sanderson, looking up from her wash-tub.

"Stephen Rae, mother," she answered, half afraid of a rebuke.

"And what brought thee with Stephen Rae? Thy gronfeyther Blackburn would have given thee a word of a sort had he seen thee wi' one o' them folk, for a' they be better off than ourselves."

Hilda was conscious of this.

"I could not help it, mother. He took up the bucket, and was off with it down the hill before I could get out a word."

"Weel, lass, it was but neighbourly; an' if thou didn't throw thyself in the lad's way, thou'rt noan to blame." And the energetic woman made the soapsuds fly as she rubbed away at a blue guernsey, and went on saying: "Will and Cuddy say we ha' no right to cast up to Peter and Steve what their great-gronfeyther was, an' that thy gronfeyther's tale was half superstition an' half prejudice, an' that it's time old animosities died out. May be it is. Me an' thy feyther have talked it over mony a time; an' though it did look like a judgment when old Peter was drowned, as his forbears were afore him, thy feyther said that, forbye a bit o' smuggling, nobody knew aught again him. An' it's noan Christian-like to turn a cold shoulder to the lads, seeing they're so good to the poor mother, though they do come of a bad stock. But, surely lass, thou needn't stand still while I talk. You might have had them potatoes peeled by this time, an' ready for the pot."

The bustling matron's reproof was not ill-timed. Hilda's knife went round the roots somewhat mechanically and slowly. She was thinking more of her mother's speech than of her occupation. It was a tolerant reversal of all preconceived notions and old beliefs—a doubt thrown on Grandfather Blackburn's theory of ill-luck as the White Woman's legacy to the Raes—a blow struck at the roots of prejudice and superstitious fear.

She hurried over the potatoes; set them to boil, and with them a dish of silvery fresh herrings, then carried the basket of newly-washed clothes to the beach, and spread them out on the shingle to dry, strewing pebbles over them to keep them down.

But all the while her mother's speech was in her mind, and consequently Stephen Rae: a conjunction Maggy Sanderson had scarcely contemplated.

When next she, on her way from the spring, in her pink half-gown and blue woollen petticoat, was overtaken by Stephen, much of her eerie dread had disappeared, and something of girlish shyness, which kept her tongue-tied, had taken its place. Whatever her mood, if he chanced to overtake her on her way from the spring, he was certain to possess himself of her pail, and carry it down the hill, no matter what other burden he might have, and he was seldom empty-handed.

And he always stepped on briskly in advance, as if to show that, though willing to serve her, he had no desire to obtrude in the way of conversation. After a time she caught herself admiring the manliness of his bearing, the careless ease with which he bore the brimming pail down the rugged path, nor spilled a drop, though, it might be, a cable or a net was slung across his shoulder; and she was prone to contrast his black curls with her brothers' red locks. At such times she would take herself to task and resolve to avoid him as her dead grandfather had enjoined. But she could neither shut her eyes nor her ears, and she found herself looking and listening for his step, and when he was not there feeling a sense of disappointment which made her angry with herself.

Her brothers had long rallied her on her sweetheart, heedless of her angry disclaimer, and her cousin, Robert Blackburn, had provoked her even to tears with his bitter taunts of barefaced impropriety in running after one of the Raes. But neither her brother nor Robert would accept her challenge to fetch water in her stead. Robert tried it for a week or ten days, but he soon found the task incompatible with his daily duty.

She was nearly seventeen before she would admit to herself that Stephen was more to her than a friend, and quite seventeen before he claimed a higher privilege.

He had watched her step by step on her way to womanhood, noted her modesty, her industry, and made himself sure of a place in her heart before he asked for it. Nay, he might have waited longer still had he not seen Robert Blackburn haunting her like a shadow, with all the facilities which cousinship and adjoining dwellings could give.

She had now to take her part with the women on the narrowed beach in unloading and preparing the fish for market and the curing-house: and as he saw red-haired Robert always at her side to lighten her labours, and was conscious she had avoided him of late, he had a salutary reminder that he might dally a little too long.

Accordingly he loitered on the path by the beach, and saw more than one damsel fill her pail and cast coquettish glances his way; but Hilda came not. He saw her busy on the beach, or leaning over the sea-wall in conversation with her brothers or Robert; but she scarcely looked towards him, and only nodded when he called to her.

In fact, she was avoiding him, fetching water when the boats were out or preparing to sail, having taken herself to task with a will.

Stephen was not easily baffled. He had gone down to the shore in his sea-boots and sailing gear, and was helping Peter to make all trim aboard the yawl, with an eye on Sanderson's cottage, when he suddenly professed to have left something at home, and set off in a hurry, leaving Peter, the two men, and the boy to get all right and tight without him.

He did not slacken his pace until he was fairly out of sight; then he stepped along at leisure and, where practicable, on the soft turf. Hilda was some paces in advance, toiling along in the hot sun with her empty pail as wearily as if it had been filled to the brim with lead.

The spring gushed cold and clear from the rock in a sheltered nook among heather and hart's-tongue fern, a few paces from the beck to which it was tributary, and here Hilda seated herself on a stone in a drooping attitude, sighed heavily, and clasped her knees with both hands as if forgetful of her errand.

A hand upon her shoulder made her start. She turned, and met the gaze of Stephen with eyes that sank before the new light in his.

"Where have you hid yourself, Hilda, the last fortnight? I had a fairing for you, and had never a chance to offer it."

"I do not want a fairing. I—I would rather not have it," faltered she, going alternately cold and hot, as he pulled a gay silk kerchief from his pocket and proceeded to tie it under her chin, saying as he did so, "Yes, you do, and will give me a kiss for it." And holding her face between his two hands, as if to look how her new head-gear became her, he lifted it up to meet the kiss he had ready for her lips.

Her modesty took fright. Never before had he by act or word overstepped the bounds of propriety. She struggled to free herself.

His arm was around her, but the clasp was that of tenderness, not power.

"Nay, Hilda," said he, "I have brought you something more than a fairing. I have brought you a true heart and honest love, and I want yours in return. And now, my lass, how is it to be?"

Hilda was not a fine lady to swoon in her lover's arms, but she had been caught in a melancholy mood, and she certainly grew sick and dizzy, half doubting her own happiness, half dreading the evils her grandsire had prognosticated. She was, however, too honest to keep him very long in doubt, and had coyly given him back his kiss,

when a loud halloo farther down the beck reminded him that the tide was on the turn, and that Hilda's pail was still empty.

Home went Hilda in a sort of dream, to be taken sharply to task for loitering; but Hilda's ears were impervious to sharp words since the magical sweetness of love had been breathed into them. It was not until the bright kerchief on her head attracted her mother's eye that she was awakened from her trance of new delight.

"Where did thee get that thing?"

There was not a colour in the silken square so brilliant as that which flushed her face as, with a sudden flash of recollection, her hand went up to her head. She had forgotten her adornment in thinking of the giver.

There was no longer hope of concealment.

"Steve Rae gave it me for a fairing," she faltered.

"An' what business had thou to take fairings from Steve Rae. Pull the thing off this minute. What would Robert say if he saw thee wearing aught that had come through Steve's fingers?"

"It's naught to Robert what I wear," jerked out Hilda, conscious that her cousin had assumed a right of dictatorship not conceded by herself; but she removed the offending head-gear nevertheless.

When the boats came in the next morning with a great take of fish, the goodwife was too busy to think of the "fairing." And by the time Maggy Sanderson bethought to broach the matter to her good man, as he smoked his long pipe in the nook, their two sons were in Steve's confidence and prepared to do battle in his behalf.

It was not so tough a contest as Hilda had expected. Her father puffed away, asked for a sight of the handkerchief, turned it over, held it to the light, felt its texture, and with the air of a connoisseur decided "that were noan bought at a fair, and it's never been smuggled in thy time or mine, Maggy."

"I only hope he came by it honestly," suggested Maggy, with an expressive jerk of the head.

"That I'm sure he did!" put in Hilda promptly, resenting the impeachment of her sweetheart.

"So am I," supplemented Cuthbert. "Peter and Steve overhauled everything when their father was drowned, and they came across lots of queer things stowed away in a sort of cellar in the rock, that had never seen daylight in their memory, or their mother's either—a mouldy box of women's tackle amongst the rest. It fell to pieces as they moved it, the fastenings were so eaten away with rust. They thought it had been in the water. I'll be bound the handkercher came out o' that."

"Mebbe so, Cuddy. When I were a lad, folks told queer tales of the old Raes and what they had in hiding-holes. But I've heard naught again the lads, though they do come of a bad crew. And as for Steve, if it were not for Robert ——"

Here both Cuddy and Will launched out in praise of Steve; the

end being tacit permission for Hilda to retain possession of her fairing, and to wear it openly with her best clothes on Sundays, greatly to the chagrin of Robert Blackburn, who counted over his savings with a rueful perception of their inadequacy to compete with Stephen Rae in the way of love-gifts.

Certainly a countess might have envied Hilda that Oriental kerchief worn by the fisher-maid in all simplicity, its value to her being only estimable as a token of Stephen's love.

Had she known whence it came, or by whom it had been worn, she would have cast it from her with a shudder. Blissfully ignorant, she walked from church, with Stephen by her side, in a flutter of pride and joy, damped—but only for the moment—by the sight of Robert Blackburn's mournful aspect as he leaned over the low parapet wall, looking drearily out to sea.

"Happy the wooing that's not long a doing! When's it to be, Hilda, lass? There's our Peter married, and Bet—it's quite time thee and me were spliced."

Steve was lying at full length, chest downwards, on the shingle, as he spoke; his elbows buried in the smooth pebbles; his upturned chin resting on his brown palms, his black eyes fixed on the face of Hilda as she—the week's work over—leaned against the stern of a boat turned keel uppermost.

"I don't know," answered Hilda irresolutely. "Mother says there's no room under Peter's roof for me. Two sons' wives and their mother on one hearth would make it too hot for the men."

"Aye, aye, like enough. But there'd be room enough for thee and me on our own hearth, dearie. I know where there's a snug cottage to be had, so you've only to say the word, and by the time the banns are out, there shall be a home ready for us. What dost say? Shall I put up the banns next week?"

"Ask father. I don't mind," replied Hilda shyly.

"Do you mind trying on these? You see, Hilda, when a fellow has made up his mind it's best to have everything ready," and he held up a massive wedding ring and keeper, the latter of curious workmanship, though neither was new.

He had her hand in his clasp, had slipped both rings upon her finger, and was raising himself to snatch a kiss, when she suddenly started to her feet, with her eyes fixed on the point of the Neb, and the startled cry, "What's that?"

The evening shades had been deepening unheeded whilst they lingered on the beach, but there on the summit of the bleak promontory she beheld a shadowy shape which thrilled her soul with fear. "What is that?" she repeated in a whisper, pointing with her finger as she spoke.

"What? Where?" questioned Stephen, in perplexity.

"That figure on the Neb?"

"I see nothing but the mist and spray. We'd best go in. The wind's rising, and we're like to have a rough night of it."

A rough night it was, but Stephen laughed at her belief that she had seen the White Woman, and said he knew the thing had never been more than mist and foam and fancy; he thought she had had more sense than to believe old women's tales.

His masterful manner kept her silent, but she could not conquer her impressions; and though she carried the two gold rings sewn in her bodice, and loved him, if possible, with a deeper and stronger affection, she put off the actual date of her marriage from time to time as if afraid to venture.

Robert Blackburn had something to do with this. Never a stormy night came but he protested he saw the White Woman hovering about the Neb, but as "nothing came of it," and no one else saw more than a wreath of mist, the village laughed him to scorn, until he held his peace and kept his previsions to himself. Yet neither Hilda Sanderson nor Hilda's mother joined the coarse mirth at his expense.

Steve had taken a pretty cottage, had fitted it up to receive his bride, not only with common appliances, but with one or two rare old things brought from some secret hoard, a carved oak coffer among the rest; had put up the banns and waited impatiently for her to fix the day. And as she put it off and put it off from time to time, for no earthly reason but that she "was afraid," he began to grow jealous of Robert Blackburn and his influence.

On Peter's marriage there had been some talk of having a new yawl built; and now it lay at its moorings on the beach; the finest and largest craft that had ever belonged to Slaith.

In proof of good will, and the better to bring Hilda to reason, the Rae brothers offered to take the Sanderson brothers into partnership, an offer Cuddy and Willy were only too glad to accept, having long aspired to something beyond their father's coble.

Their generosity overpowered Hilda; banished Maggy's last objection; the wedding-day was fixed; they were to be married on the Sunday.

On the previous Thursday the yawl called the "United Brothers" was to make its trial trip, an extra man and boy completing the crew, with Peter as master.

That morning early Hilda wakened with a shiver. She had dreamed that Stephen placed the wedding-ring and its keeper on her finger, when the White Woman came between them and plucked it off. There was no more chance of sleep. The very moonlight streaming through her lattice seemed to mock her. For the first time the atmosphere of the narrow room seemed to stifle her.

To breathe more freely and shake off her fears she lifted the latch of the front door and stepped across the path to the sea wall.

Was she still dreaming, or had her fancy conjured up a ghost to

haunt her? There in the pale moonlight the tall, ethereal form of a woman robed in white, with a hood or shawl of densest black, was slowly making the circuit of the "United Brothers," one shadowy hand gliding over the smooth surface of the hull. Too much appalled to scream, Hilda gasped for breath. Her head swam. She clutched the low wall for support. Another moment and the weird figure was gone.

Back to her bed she crept, stunned and terrified. A sort of stupor bound her senses. Then she slept so heavily, the shrill voice of her mother rebuking laziness could scarcely rouse her.

Once awake all the terrors of the night came back to her. Her first impulse was to seek her brothers and Steve, tell them all she had dreamed and seen, and implore them not to launch the new yawl that day.

Her brothers listened and looked one at another in doubt. Peter Rae frowned, and asked her how fishermen were to live and keep their families if they stayed ashore when their wives had bad dreams. He scouted the idea that it was anything more than a dream.

Her appeal had more effect on Steve, to whom she clung in entreaty, though he too held that she was the dupe of her own fancy. Her pale face and tearful eyes unnerved him. He was half inclined to hold back, and induce the others to put off the trial of the new boat until after the wedding.

She saw her advantage, and to clinch her argument reminded him that Robert Blackburn had seen the White Woman, more than once.

Jealous Steve set his teeth sternly.

"Oh! Robert Blackburn! There, that's enough, my lass. I want none of Robert Blackburn's hand on our tiller; and shall not wait his breath for a fair wind. You'd best go up to our house and have all put to rights for the wedding; and remember you're mistress there till I come back—or, if I never come back." He said this with his ordinary lightness; drew from his pocket a curious necklet, with a heart-shaped locket, clasped it round her throat as a wedding gift and with a hearty kiss said she was to wear it for his sake. But he would hear no more of keeping back the boat, either for Robert Blackburn or the White Woman, whilst the sky was clear and wind and tide in their favour.

Wind and tide in their favour. The "United Brothers" slipped her cable, set her helm, spread her brown sails to the breeze, and with all her nets in readiness, breasted the dancing waves as if proud that the antipathies of generations were at an end, and she bore the proof.

Wind and tide in their favour. A peaceful twilight. A promising nightfall. Only a low mist creeping over the waters. Women and children sleeping calmly as the waves.

What was that?

The invisible hand of a hurricane shaking the windows and doors

of Slaith. Billows battering and breaking over the sea-wall in foam. A blacker midnight never roused a population to wait in fear and trembling for the morn.

And there, on the extreme point of the Neb, the only thing distinctly visible in the darkness, clearly outlined, stood the White Woman, slowly and majestically waving her arms as if in exultation.

Other eyes than Hilda's saw, other hearts than Hilda's sank with prehension.

The swift storm was over; the turbulent wreck-strewn sea was at rest. One by one the fishing-boats came home, some laden, some empty; all in sorry plight, and all late.

All? No, not all. Robert Blackburn had piloted old Sanderson's coble safely mid the rocks and shallows. But what of the "United Brothers"?

There was never a wedding-day for Hilda. Brothers and betrothed had sailed together and sunk together, and with them had perished all her hopes.

Grey-haired as her own mother, she wept as she recalled, too late, her grandfather Cuthbert's warning for all of his honest kith and kin to "steer clear of the Raes," and bitterly reiterated that her "dream had indeed come true—the White Woman *had* torn her wedding-ring from her finger!"

"Aye, and wrecked the last of the Raes and those who dared to claim brotherhood with them," cried Robert Blackburn remorselessly. "You knew the White Woman's silent curse lay on those who let her die unaided, and the good ship go down with every human soul for the sake of spoil. Yet you suffered Steve Rae to adorn you with finery from the wreck, and bind you to himself with the rings his forbear Peter Rae cut from the dead woman's fingers. You did not know it? You knew they were never honest gains, and the Raes were a bad lot. You had better have been content with a poorer mate and a good name."

"I shall never mate. Poor or rich, good or bad, I shall take no man's name," said Hilda with a shudder.

She kept her word, and, keeping it, has kept alive the dread of the White Woman of the Wreck among the fisher-folk of Slaith.

COLIN CLOUT.

By the Author of "Molly: A Sketch in Three Tones."

AT eighteen Alicia Grand had consented to become Alicia Little. She had yielded to the earnest entreaties of Mr. Little, but she always declared herself ill-matched, and pronounced it impossible to be happy with a man who was not famous. As the years advanced, Mr. Little felt that, in wooing Miss Grand so strenuously that she had been compelled to yield, he had performed an action of peculiar baseness, only to be overlooked at all by the fact of its having been committed in the almost juvenile days of his twenty-second year.

"But perhaps I shall be famous yet," he said, sometimes.

"No, no," replied Alicia, sadly. "It is too unlikely. You won't go into Parliament, and there is nothing else you can do."

"But I have no taste for Parliament," said Mr. Little. "If I am to be famous, it must be as Nature dictates. You know one could not expect everyone to be like your favourite—Colin Clout."

"Oh! don't name Colin Clout," cried the wife, raising her hands in entreaty. "Your lips seem to profane his existence. Colin Clout is a splendid poet. He will soon be *the* poet of the time. You can't understand his poetry, and you should not speak of him. With me it is different. I have been a poetess from my birth."

Alicia had indeed written some very fine poems, of great length, and in blank verse; but their success had not been very great, and publishers, though polite, had been unappreciative.

But she was wont to send copies of her poems to six unknown friends, three poets and three poetesses, whose acquaintance she had formed through the perusal of their verses in papers and magazines, and with whom she corresponded diligently, notwithstanding that the names of some of them were even less poetic and euphonious than her own. She had been married several years when Colin Clout, the poet whose fame waxed greater with every line he wrote, published a volume bearing the somewhat curious title of "His Poems." But its contents were incomparable. The book was in everyone's hand, it was the theme of every tongue. Alicia purchased it and learnt much of it by heart, keeping it carefully from her husband.

"I could not bear you to touch it, my dear," she said, putting it behind her back.

"Why not?" he asked.

"How often have I told you that you had no soul, no ideas," said Alicia. "You, who can sit scribbling on the back of an envelope, amidst

a chattering crowd, cannot conceive the creative moment, when the poet, wrapped in solitude, *forces* words to express his thoughts."

"No, I cannot," said Mr. Little, frankly.

"Then what would be the good of my allowing you to read 'His Poem'?" said Alicia.

"At least, you might read them to me," he urged. Whereupon Alicia consented so far as to read aloud the opening dedication to the poet's wife.

"Matchless," she murmured, as she closed the book.

"Spoilt by that comma at the end of the third line," remarked Mr. Little. "It should have been a semi-colon. I don't think very much of Colin Clout, if this is all he can do."

Alicia hardly deigned a reply. A slight shiver ran through her frame. Undoubtedly, if her husband assumed the position of a poetical critic, her only refuge was in silence. She took up her pen, and began to write.

"I have invited my friends here on Sunday," she observed, coldly. "We have never yet met, but it so happens we are all in town now, and we mean to unite in offering congratulations and homage to Colin Clout on the appearance of 'His Poems.'"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Little. "You are going to have the Budges and Butchers, and all the rest of them, here!"

"Yes," said Alicia, reddening faintly. "But we have all taken noms de plume, to prevent the cruel necessity of speaking each other's names, which are mostly so barbarous. My poetess friends are no longer Miss Butcher, Miss Flint, and Mrs. Buzzard, but Clarinda, Daphne, and Sappho; while Mr. Budge, Mr. Salmon, and Mr. Lushington, have become Narcissus, Florimel, and Eugenius."

"And what are you, dearest?" asked Mr. Little, with great interest.

"They are good enough to call me Thalia," she said, modestly. She resumed her pen, but after dipping it into the ink several times she still wrote nothing.

"What are you doing?" asked her husband. "Could I help you?"

Alicia started. "No indeed," she said. "I am writing a few appropriate lines to celebrate our first meeting; but, though I do sadly want a rhyme, it is of no use your offering assistance. Poets, my poor husband, are *born*, not *made*."

But when Sunday arrived, Alicia's sonnet of inauguration was ready, and she herself seated in state to receive her guests.

"Ah!" she was thinking, fixing her bright expectant eyes on the door. "Now I shall have an hour of really delightful converse. It thrills my soul to think of the poetic minds with whom I shall soon be in actual contact."

Sappho, in the person of Mrs. Buzzard, was the first to arrive. she was a tall, gaunt woman, with blue spectacles and a dusty dress,

and an air of timidity, as if the man who had given her the right to sign her name Buzzard was accustomed to exercise certain rights of his own with a too untangible reserve.

"My dear Thalia," she said, in a low hurried voice, "the pleasure of this meeting is beyond the expression of words. I have brought a little poem to express my appreciation of your uncommon talents, and the uncommon talents of our brothers and sisters. But I will reserve it. I see I come, like the dawn in summer, almost too soon."

"Never too soon, dear Sappho," murmured Alicia.

"There is one thing I should like to say before the others come," said Sappho, hastily, and nervously looking over her shoulder from time to time, as if she saw the form of Mr. Buzzard in some remote corner. "The cherished companion of your walk through life's shade and sunshine—does he approve?"

The opportune arrival of Mr. Budge at this moment saved Alicia the necessity of a reply, and she had scarcely welcomed him, and introduced him to Sappho, when Mr. Lushington appeared; and was immediately followed by the entrance of Miss Butcher, Miss Flint, and Mr. Salmon.

"We have two pleasures before us," said Alicia, smiling round her. "First, to testify our unspeakable admiration of Colin Clout, and then to delight in the poems which we have, each one, produced especially for this occasion. Mr. Salmon—Florimel—I beg you to be seated."

For Florimel, apparently the oldest, and indubitably the stoutest, of the group, remained standing.

"My good madam," he said huskily, and with some irritation, "I am seventy! you can't expect seventy years to repose themselves upon low chairs and divans—like these!"

Eugenius, whose appearance was characterised by an extreme pallor and fragility, looked disgusted. Clarinda and Daphne, who were friends, and had come together, leaned back in their chairs with gestures of abhorrence.

"Mr. Budge, pray ring the bell," said Alicia. "A more convenient chair shall be brought. I am so sorry, Mr. Salmon, but——"

"You did not think I was so antique and unwieldy," said the old gentleman, crossly. "People never do think. I beg you, madam, to tell me how I could have furnished the Poet's Corner for the *Conversationalist* for the last fifty years, if I were not seventy?"

"We were not aware you had done so," said Miss Butcher.

But a chair suitable to the needs of embonpoint being now procured, a degree of harmony fell upon the scene, and the poets and poetesses looked expectantly at Alicia.

"If Thalia would unlock her lips," suggested Mr. Lushington, theatrically.

"We are met together, dear poet friends," began Alicia, "to con-

gratulate ourselves, the world, and the author, upon the appearance of a volume of poems of unsurpassed beauty, by Colin Clout."

"Unsurpassed *as yet*," corrected Miss Butcher. "I know of but one work to supersede it, and that is "The Remains of Daphne," as yet unpublished, but to be committed to the press by me, after the death of my friend, Miss Flint."

"After my death," said Miss Flint, who looked many years younger than Miss Butcher.

"Madam," said Mr. Salmon, with sarcasm, "may you live a thousand years!"

"Narcissus," interrupted Alicia, quickly, and turning to that personage, a sad looking gentleman of about forty, whose ill-fitting clothes and haggard appearance seemed to bespeak poverty, or a strange caprice: "Narcissus, you have hardly spoken. Do you not think we may consider "His Poems" an unsurpassed work, and congratulate Colin Clout accordingly?"

Thus addressed, Mr. Budge glanced nervously at the four ladies, and then said, "Yes, yes! Anything you like, Thalia! anything!—pray do so!—yes, yes!"

"What rhymes with *surpass*, ladies and gentlemen?" threw in Florimel, at this juncture.

Alicia and Eugenius smiled. Thus encouraged, Sappho smiled too. Florimel laughed aloud.

"If Thalia is going to encourage such coarse frivolity," exclaimed Clarinda, "Daphne and I must take our leave."

"No, no," cried Alicia. "Pray don't be vexed, Clarinda. I am sure Florimel meant nothing."

"*Lass* rhymes with *surpass* as well as *ass*," observed Sappho, timidly.

Those who had laughed before laughed again; those who had frowned before frowned now. Sappho was painfully conscious of having made matters worse by her unfortunate remark.

"The business in hand," continued Alicia, "is to offer our congratulations to Colin Clout on his unsurpassed work ——"

"Thalia!" said Eugenius, "most deferentially, but with absolute firmness, I beg to say that if the word *unsurpassed* be adhered to, I must sorrowfully decline to affix my signature to the memorial."

"But what can we say instead?" asked Alicia, vexed, but preserving her good humour.

"Keep to *unsurpassed*, by all means," said Florimel. "I shall not sign it if it be altered. As to Eugenius, the poem he refers to as surpassing Colin Clout is his own sheepish pastoral, which the *Weekly Idyllic* has been weak enough to publish."

Alicia knew not what to do. But after a momentary pause, a bright idea struck her.

"Perhaps we had better read our poems first," she said, "We can sign the memorial presently. Clarinda, may I call upon you to begin?"

Clarinda readily acquiesced, and proceeded, in blank verse, to describe a storm, and then a calm, in language equally well-chosen.

The reading had continued for about a quarter of an hour—for the poem was long—when a sudden deep and sonorous sound disturbed the tranquillity of the little party. Sappho looked apprehensively at Florimel, and put her finger to her lips.

"Oh! pray don't wake him!" she murmured. "Pray do not rouse him from his rosy dreams!"

"He snores," pronounced Eugenius.

"He is asleep, you know," said Narcissus, with a feeble desire to make things clear.

Clarinda folded up her manuscript with much parade. "Intolerable coarseness," she ejaculated.

"Why should the reading stop?" asked Alicia, rather anxiously. "If Florimel does not care to listen, it is his loss alone."

But the steadfast Clarinda shook her head. An unpardonable affront had been offered to her. "I read no more," she said.

Alicia begged the others to proceed, and this they did in turn; but the sleeping form of Florimel, and the icy demeanour of the two outraged ladies, seemed to lie like wet blankets on the little assembly. Sappho read first. Clarinda and Daphne listened to the simple doggrel with an almost audible scorn. Alicia herself was glad that the piece possessed, at least, the merit of brevity.

"Thank you," she exclaimed, cheerfully. "Those are very pretty lines, dear Sappho. Daphne, may we now call upon you?" But Daphne would not read.

"She cannot read while that monster sleeps," announced Clarinda.

Half-amused, half-disgusted, Alicia begged the gentlemen to bring forward their productions, whereupon Eugenius, standing, and with much oratorical effect, recited a poem which he had entitled "The Murderer," and which was very terrible, and greatly resembled "Eugene Aram." As no one remarked upon this, however, Eugenius re-seated himself, with satisfaction.

Narcissus' poem was called "Place aux Dames," and opened by asserting that—

> Ladies are like radiant roses,
> Men are grovelling worms,—

whereat Sappho shivered visibly, and seemed to imply that, whatever women *might* be in brighter spheres, she had never discovered anything grovelling or worm-like in the men she knew best, and notably not in the one whose name she bore.

"Thank you, Narcissus," said Alicia. "You are very chivalrous. I suppose," she added, "there is no good in waiting for Florimel."

"Oh no! let us not intrude on the realms of his balmy slumbers," said Sappho.

"Will not the honeyed lips of Thalia read her own poem to us?" insinuated Eugenius.

Acquiescing, Alicia opened the portfolio in which she had left her sonnet. But it was gone, and in its place lay an unpretending sheet of note-paper, on which she knew no verse of hers had ever been transcribed. Nevertheless, a sonnet was there, and it was signed by the name of Colin Clout.

"Something very strange has happened," cried Alicia. "I cannot account for it, or explain it; but it is most extraordinary. I placed a sonnet of my own in this portfolio this morning. It has been spirited away, and, lo! a sonnet of Colin Clout's has replaced it!"

"I imagine that Colin Clout is an acquaintance of Thalia's," observed Clarinda, frigidly. "Probably the explanation is in that fact."

"I do not know him. I have never seen him. I do not even know his real name," cried Alicia. "Loath as I am to admit the possibility of miracles, I own I regard this occurrence with superstition. But the sonnet, however it came here, is unsurpassed. Let me read it."

She began to read hastily, lest Eugenius should again quarrel with the adjective she had adopted; but all were spell-bound, for the sonnet was one of incomparable beauty; and so graceful was the tribute which Colin Clout therein paid to the poet-souls at the moment assembled, that even Clarinda and Daphne murmured applause. The little burst of enthusiasm woke Florimel, who sat up with a start, and asked what time it was.

Sappho hastened to explain what had happened, and then Alicia, at the instance of Florimel, read the sonnet again.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" said Florimel, with a sigh. "My own chorus would not be supportable after it."

"But do read it," said Alicia, gently.

"No; it would be too humiliating," said Florimel. "We must sink when Colin Clout is present."

"I feel it," said Alicia, fervently. She rang for tea, and the poets began to talk in groups.

"Thalia," said Eugenius, coming forward, "I am quite willing to sign the memorial now. After hearing that sonnet, I admit that Colin Clout is an unsurpassed poet. *I* have written nothing to compare with it."

"I imagine not," said Florimel, dryly.

"Narcissus will sign also," said Eugenius.

"Yes, yes," stammered Narcissus; "if the ladies do so, I'll do it."

"I sign, of course," said Alicia, in a clear voice; "and Sappho will sign too, I am sure; and, dear Clarinda, you and Daphne?"

The three ladies advanced.

"Until the 'Remains' I mentioned before are published," said Clarinda, "I consider Colin Clout's poems to be unsurpassed. *After* that publication, things will wear a different aspect; but at this hour I sign without reluctance."

"Then we are all agreed," said Alicia. And the real business of the meeting was concluded.

When the guests had departed, Mr. Little ventured into the drawing-room, where he found his wife looking flushed and fatigued.

"I am afraid you are very tired, my darling," he said, taking her hand. "But I hope you have enjoyed your friends. Tell me how you got on."

"Well, they all agreed to sign the memorial at last," said Alicia, somewhat dejectedly. "But they disappointed me. Their conversation was not a bit more poetical than—than yours, and their behaviour was less so; for you are always agreeable and polite, and they were all either rude or awkward."

Mr. Little smiled. "You must expect eccentricities from born poets," he remarked.

"Nonsense, my dear," cried Alicia. "They are no more born poets than you are. As for me, I am never going to write a line again—*never!*"

"Well! was the sonnet of inauguration appreciated?" asked Mr. Little.

"That is a great mystery," said Alicia, in a low voice. "My poem has vanished, and in its stead I found the most exquisite sonnet of Colin Clout's. How could it have got into my portfolio?"

"I put it there, dear one."

"You?"

"Yes," said Mr. Little. "I know Colin Clout very well, and I got him to write a sonnet, on purpose to please you. You had better give me the memorial to make over to him."

"What!" cried Alicia, at last finding words. "You know Colin Clout! Why have you never told me so before, O most unpoetical husband? Why, why have you never introduced him to me?"

"Because he is not the sort of man you like."

"How do you know?" she asked, impatiently.

"He is very like me, dearest."

"Impossible!"

"Indeed, it is true. We are as like as twin brothers."

"I cannot believe it," said Alicia, emphatically.

"But, my darling, listen to me. I have often been on the point of telling you before, but something has always stayed me. I know not whether poets are born or made, but I have written poetry all my life, and now I am proud to tell my wife that her husband *is* famous, for—*he is Colin Clout!*"

And the poet kissed away the penitent tears that started into Alicia's eyes, and the penitent words that rose to her lips.

GREAT WRITERS AT WORK.

HOW delightful it would be to trace the evolvements of "The Canterbury Tales," or "The Faërie Queen," from the first germ of conception through its various stages to completion—to learn exactly how it was written, under what circumstances and conditions; whether the ideas easily shaped themselves into words, or whether there was much blotting and erasing and rewriting before it assumed the exquisite form in which we possess the poem.

Much of Chaucer's work was undoubtedly meditated out in the meads, among the flowers, in the early morning. In his portrait of himself, as the clerk of Oxenford, he tells us that he had at his bed's head "twenty bookes clothed in black and red," which certainly indicates that he was addicted to "waste the midnight oil." Chaucer was a busy man of the world, a soldier, a courtier, an envoy. He held offices under the State and sat in Parliament, and probably it was only in the late hours of the night that he found time for literary composition.

Of Spenser we know too little even for conjectures. "The Faërie Queen" is supposed to have been conceived and commenced during his sojourn at Court; but the greater portion was written at Kilcolman, the ancient castle of the proscribed Desmonds, whose lands had been obtained for him through Sydney's interest.

It was a savage, romantic building, rising on the shores of a lake, and the great plain in which it stood was surrounded by distant ranges of wooded mountains. Never was poet's lot cast in a situation more congenial to his task. Within those gray walls the common places of civilization could have had no existence for him. He lived in a world of romance and superstition, peopled by the eerie creatures of the wild Celtic fancy: he wandered daily in the gloomy forests he described, where every ruin, and cave, and weird haunt had its legend. Amidst such scenes the beautiful, the terrible, and the grotesque forms of his imagination must have become more real to him than the realities of that artificial world of man from which he was so utterly separated.

What would we not give to know how Shakspeare's masterpieces were composed—to trace "Macbeth" or "Lear," "Othello" or "Hamlet," from its first suggestion to its perfect form! Probably we should be disappointed by its simplicity, for, of all men of genius, Shakspeare appears to have had the least of eccentricity or strangeness. The greater number of his plays were written in London—or, at least, evidence is in favour of such a conclusion, for with the scanty information we possess we can never pronounce with certainty upon any

points that relate to Shakspeare—written amidst the prosaic duties of theatre-manager and actor. We know that he was a lover of society and of good cheer, that he liked to spend his evenings at "The Devil" or "The Mermaid." These duties and recreations must have left him little time for composition—only the late hours of the night or the early morning. It is said that he never blotted a line: perhaps each one was perfected before it was committed to paper.

We all know how "Paradise Lost" was written. There is no more distinct picture of the author at work in literary history than that of the severe figure of the blind poet giving forth his immortal utterances to the pens of his daughters. "When he first rose," says Johnson, "he heard a chapter in the Hebrew Bible, and then studied till twelve; then took some exercise for an hour, then dined; then played on the organ, and sang, or heard another sing; then studied till six; then entertained his visitors till eight, then supped; and, after a pipe of tobacco and a glass of water, went to bed. When he did not care to rise early he had something read to him by his bedside; perhaps at this time his daughters were employed. He composed much in the morning, and dictated in the day, sitting obliquely in a chair, with his leg thrown over the arm."

How Dryden, the next great poet in succession, worked, I cannot find recorded; doubtless at any time and all times, whenever the need of money pressed him. Pope always required his writing-desk to be set upon his bed before he rose. Gray, the author of the Elegy, was perhaps of all writers the most curiously minute in his method: it is said that he perfected each line separately, amending and rewriting it over and over again, and never commenced another until the first had wholly satisfied his fastidious taste.

Byron sat down to write without any premeditation: his ideas flowed with his ink, and one line suggested the next. But after the poem was completed, and during its passage through the press, he was continually altering, interlining, and adding. The first copy of "The Giaour" consisted of only four hundred lines; to each new edition were added new passages, until it swelled to nearly fourteen hundred lines. During the printing of "The Bride of Abydos" he added two hundred lines, and many of the original were altered again and again.

One of the most constantly laborious writers of whom we have any account was Southey. In one of his letters he says: "Imagine me in this great study of mine (at Gesta Hall, Keswick) from breakfast till dinner, from dinner till tea, and from tea till supper, in my old black coat, my corduroys alternated with the long worsted pantaloons and gaiters in one, and the green shade, and sitting at my desk, and you have my picture and my history. . . . My actions are as regular as those of Saint Dunstan's quarter bags. Three pages of history after breakfast; then to transcribe and copy for press, or to make my selections and biographies, or what else suits my humour

till dinner time; from dinner till tea I read, write letters, see the newspaper, and very often indulge in a siesta. After tea I go to poetry, and correct and rewrite and copy till I am tired, and then turn to anything till supper; and this is my life, which, if it be not a merry one, is yet as happy as heart could wish."

In striking contrast to this wholly sedentary life was that of his neighbour and fellow poet, Wordsworth. His poems were composed during his long morning walks upon the mountains, surrounded by the scenery, the objects, and the incidents they describe, which thus visually inspired and wrought out his conceptions. Upon returning home he would go to bed, and while eating his breakfast dictate to an amanuensis.

To pass from the poets to the prose writers, Johnson's method was to thoroughly think out his subject before he put pen to paper, not only in its salient points, but word for word as it was to appear in print, which must have been a great effort of memory to begin with. Mr. Trevelyan gives the following account of how Macaulay wrote his history: "As soon as he had got into his head any particular episode in his history, he would sit down and write off the whole story at a headlong pace, sketching in the outlines under the genial and audacious impulse of a first conception, and securing in black and white each idea, and epithet, and turn of phrase, as it flowed straight from his busy brain to his rapid fingers. His manuscript, at this stage, to the eyes of anyone but himself, appeared to consist of column after column of dashes and flourishes, in which a straight line with a half-formed letter at each end and another in the middle, did duty for a word. . . . As soon as Macaulay had finished his rough draft, he began to fill it in at the rate of six sides of foolscap every morning; written in so large a hand, and with such a multitude of erasures, that the whole six pages were on an average compressed into two pages of print. This portion he called his 'task,' and he was never quite easy unless he completed it daily. More he seldom sought to accomplish; for he had learned by long experience that this was as much as he could do at his best; and except at his best he never would write at all." He never wrote except he was in the humour, and stopped as soon as his thoughts ceased to flow fast. He never allowed a sentence to pass until it was as good as he could make it. He would recast a chapter to obtain a more lucid arrangement, and reconstruct a paragraph for the sake of one happy stroke or apt illustration. He spent nineteen days over his description of the Massacre of Glencoe, and then expressed dissatisfaction at the result.

There could be no more notable antithesis to this elaborate method than that of Sir Walter Scott. He wrote with marvellous rapidity; his pen was never stopped by the want of a word. If it did not come readily he left a blank space and sped on to the rest. Correction was distasteful to him, and as the ideas flowed from his brain they were set down and never altered. He could write while children were

playing about the room, and amidst conversation or almost any disturbing influence.

Fanny Kemble, in the "Records of My Girlhood," tells a good story in illustration of this. "I can never forget the description Sir Adam Fergusson gave me of a morning he had passed with Scott at Abbotsford, which at that time was still unfinished, swarming with carpenters, painters, masons, and bricklayers, and surrounded with all the dirt and disorderly discomfort inseparable from the process of house-building. The room they sat in was in the roughest condition which admitted of their occupying it at all: the raw, new chimney smoked intolerably. Out of doors the place was one mass of bricks, mortar, scaffolding, tiles, and slates. A heavy mist shrouded the whole landscape of lovely Tweedside, and distilled in a cold, persistent, and dumb drizzle. Maida, the well-beloved staghound, kept fidgetting in and out of the room, Walter Scott every five minutes exclaiming, 'Eh, Adam, the puir beasti's just wearyin' to get out;' or 'Eh, Adam, the puir creature's just crying to come in;' when Sir Adam would open the door to the raw, chilly air, for the wet, muddy hound's exit or entrance, while Scott, with his face swollen with a grievous toothache, and one hand pressed hard to his cheek, with the other was writing the inimitably humorous opening chapters of 'The Antiquary,' which he passed across the table sheet by sheet to his friend, saying, 'Now, Adam, d'ye think that'll do?'"

Contrast with this Lord Lytton's mode of working. His study, richly furnished in the Elizabethan style, was isolated from the rest of the house, so that the least noise, which would have irritated him in the extreme, might be intercepted. While writing, the floor around him would be strewn with books and papers, and so jealous was he of the privacy of this sanctum that few were ever admitted within its walls. In his latter days he never devoted more than three hours to composition. After partaking in abstracted silence of a light breakfast, he would enter his study at ten, and regularly as the clock struck one he would emerge, and his labours were finished for the day.

Dickens was a very methodical worker; his usual hours of writing were between breakfast and luncheon. But his marvellously active brain was ceaselessly employed in collecting materials. Nothing escaped his keen eye—not an odd name over a shop door, not a peculiar face, or a peculiar expression heard in passing through the streets, or the commonest incidents, whether appertaining to man or beast; all were absorbed into the vast store-house of his mind, to be blended with other reminiscences, or with original ideas; to be transfused, sublimated, and reproduced in other forms thereafter.

This is Mrs. Gaskell's account of the Brontë sisters' mode of working: "It was the household custom among the girls to sew till nine o'clock at night. At that hour Miss Bramwell generally went to bed, and her nieces' duties were accounted done. They put away their work, and began to pace the room backwards and forwards, up and

down—as often with candles extinguished, for economy's sake, as not—three figures glancing into the firelight and out into the shadow perpetually. In after years this was the time for discussing together the plots of their novels." It was not every day that Charlotte could write. Sometimes there were gaps of weeks and even months in the composition of "Jane Eyre." Then, some morning, she would wake with her mind full of ideas, and resume the thread of the narrative. They had an old servant, nearly eighty years of age, whose failing sight often left black specks in the potatoes she insisted upon peeling, and many a time did Charlotte lay down her pen, in the fulness of her inspiration, to remedy this culinary defect. She wrote her first draft in a minute hand upon scraps of paper, which she held against a piece of bookbinder's board as she sat in the firelight or up in bed at night.

One more sketch of a literary worker, perhaps, of all, the most extraordinary and unique. This time we take our illustration from a foreign source: it is Honoré de Balzac we are going to look in upon. Each of his novels, at least after he became great, was thoroughly thought out in all its ramifications before he put pen to paper. He would take a long journey to obtain the minutest point of a description, even of a street of a country town. As Dickens in London, so was he in Paris, ever in the streets, note-book in hand, ever piercing and penetrating into every class of society. When all the materials of his proposed work were amassed, he would retire from the outward world. Every visitor was refused admittance, letters were left unopened, even the daylight was shut out, and candles supplied its place. His ordinary costume was exchanged for a loose, white, monkish gown, Turkish trousers, and slippers. He rose at two A.M., and wrote from that time until six; then he took a bath, in which he remained meditating frequently for an hour; at eight he took coffee, rested for another hour, and then resumed his writing until noon; after which there was another hour's interval for déjeûner; from one to six he wrote again, dined, received his publisher, and went to bed at eight.

This kind of life sometimes endured for two months. When it came to an end he had accomplished only the first rough draft of the work. Sometimes it was almost entirely rewritten, chapters we transposed, expanded, altered. Then came the proofs, the marg ns of which were entirely covered with corrections; the revises, first, second, and sometimes third and fourth, were returned in a condition almost as illegible. He was the terror of printers; few could read his copy, and those who could made an express stipulation with their employer to work on it only one hour at a time. "I toil sixteen hours out of the twenty-four," he said, "over the elaboration of my unfortunate style, and I am never satisfied with it when it is done."

H. Barton Baker.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

THE three girls were going to spend a month at the seaside—Lydia, Rosa, and Julia Tafferel. Their aunt, Miss Hamlet, after keeping them in suspense for weeks—now up in the skies of hope, now down in the dust of despair—at length made up her mind, and announced her decision—to go. "But I'm sure," she added, "I don't know what will come of it."

Charlotte Hamlet had thought fate rather cruel when, three years ago now, she heard of the death of her widowed sister, Mary Tafferel, and that the three daughters she left in the world had no protector, unless she herself became one. The girls had three hundred a year conjointly—that is, one hundred pounds each, and could have kept a home over their heads by living together; but they were young for that, and, Miss Hamlet suspected, somewhat giddy. She was well off herself, and had a roomy, pleasant house. It was not on that score she shrank from the prospect; but she was rather an invalid, nervous, and loving above all things a quiet life. However, there appeared to be no help for it, and she wrote to her nieces to come. "We must all have crosses," murmured poor Miss Hamlet, "and I suppose this will become one for me; but I have been pretty free from them hitherto, and must not repine."

The girls arrived at Stagbrook, Miss Hamlet's village home. The eldest of them was twenty-three, the youngest twenty-one. They turned out to be pleasant, sociable, and chatty; full of life and spirits, eager for any gaiety that might fall in their way, and very anxious, each of the three, to pick up a husband.

"Small blame to them either," freely spoke up Mrs. O'Malley, an intimate friend of Miss Hamlet's. "What do girls expect but to marry? and sure the young men are growing scarce!"

Nearly three years had elapsed since they came to Miss Hamlet, and there had been no change, when that lady bethought herself of taking them to the seaside, and bade them prepare themselves.

To get away *anywhere* was something; but the place she had fixed upon, Brightwater, was new and untried, not a dozen houses as yet in it. A grand hotel was just built, the size of which might, perhaps, make up for the scarcity of other accommodation. It was called the Royal Victoria, and it took its guests by the week, somewhat as a boarding-house does, or after the fashion of Scarborough. Miss Hamlet had written to the Royal Victoria to make arrangements, Mrs. O'Malley, who had just returned from a fortnight's sojourn there, having praised it warmly.

"It is not exactly what I like," said Miss Hamlet to her nieces, as they sat at tea. "I have never tried the life myself, and I fear it will

prove to be too familiar; but we can leave the hotel at the end of the first week for lodgings if we choose."

"Oh, Aunt Charlotte," exclaimed Rosa, "it will seem like Paradise after this dreadful Stagbrook."

"Dreadful Stagbrook!" repeated Miss Hamlet, gazing in amazement through her spectacles. "What do you mean by that, Rosa?"

Rosa dropped her high tone. "Well, aunt, Stagbrook *is* dull; you must know that."

"I have never found it so, young lady, and I have lived all my life in it."

"Yes, aunt; I suppose that makes the difference. *We* did not think Chichester dull."

"I wish the holiday to be pleasant to you all," resumed Miss Hamlet, stiffly; "and I shall take Dorothy Krane."

"Dorothy Krane!" screamed all the three girls in chorus. "Dolly Krane!"

"Yes; why not?" said Miss Hamlet. "She will be a pleasant companion for you."

"Why, Aunt Charlotte, Dolly won't have a decent thing to appear in!" exclaimed Lydia.

"She'll do very well. People are not expected to be fine at the sea-side. Fancy dressing up at an hotel!"

Lydia kicked Julia under the table, and Julia kicked Rosa. The young ladies were taking every smart thing they possessed, with enough ribbons and fal-lals to fill a trunk.

"Nearly all Dolly's dresses are cotton!"

"If they are they are delicate and pretty," said Miss Hamlet. "More sugar, do you say, Julia? She has her grey silk for best; now that it's turned it looks as good as new. And Dorothy tells me ——"

"Have you been to the parsonage, Aunt Charlotte?"

"Yes; walked over this morning when you three went out shopping. Three hours you were gone! I was back long before you came in. One would think you wanted something at every shop in Stagbrook."

"All the prints Dolly's got have been washed ever so many times, aunt."

"I daresay they have. They'll be just the things for the seaside. Then she has that pretty figured muslin that was new last year; and for best, she has her white. Not that, as I believe, she will require to wear it. Dorothy asked me whether it had better be taken or not."

"The white has been washed too," cried Lydia. "I wonder Mr. and Mrs. Krane can spare her. How will the children get on without Dolly, Aunt Charlotte?—and the parish?—and the schools?"

"As well as they can," answered Miss Hamlet. "All work and no play is not good for anybody—least good of all for the young. Dolly needs a change more than you do, and the team stood in Mr.

Krane's eyes when he thanked me for thinking of her. Another cup, Lydia?"

The church and parsonage stood half a mile from Stagbrook. The Reverend Abel Krane was the incumbent; a hard-working, conscientious man, with a flock of children, and a small income to keep them on. Dolly was the eldest; and she had to teach and take care of the others, not to speak of the running about in the parish, which she partly did for her mother, who was as hard-worked as the Rector. Mrs. Krane, formerly Dorothy Hamlet, was first cousin to Miss Charlotte Hamlet and to Mrs. Tafferel.

Brightwater was reached; and the Royal Victoria proved to be an imposing white mansion, with pillars and balconies and green blinds. Miss Hamlet found it very comfortable and liked it better than she had thought for.

A slight accident happened to her the day after her arrival. In stepping from a carriage, for she had treated the young people to a drive, she twisted her foot. It was nothing very serious, needing only a few days' rest. So Miss Hamlet reposed on one of the sofas near the window in the ladies' drawing-room, by day, feasting her eyes on the beautiful, ever-moving sea, and conversing placidly with another invalid lady, who had come to Brightwater to recover strength after an illness, and did not seem to be able to do it quickly.

For the girls this was just delightful. Not, of course, that they could rejoice over a twisted ankle, but it was pleasant to be able to go about without the supervision of Aunt Charlotte. The hotel was not half full, but it was enjoying itself. There was a little carpet-dancing, a little flirting, and short moonlight promenades in the hotel garden and on the beach.

One drawback the Miss Tafferels did find: not a soul of the male sex, then at the hotel, could be pronounced quite eligible. Three or four very young men, who were there with their mothers and sisters, and three or four middle-aged ones, who looked grave, and no doubt had wives at home, comprised the list. But the three sisters got a great deal of admiration; they were tall, stylish, and showy, with rather Spanish-looking faces, sparkling dark eyes, and blue-black hair. Their manners in society were perfect; their repartees delightful. "Three *charming* girls!" declared young Mr. Pender a dozen times a day, or as often as he could get away from his tutor. "Never saw such beauties!"

Dolly Krane was nowhere beside them: eclipsed as a pale star by the brilliant moon. She was pretty in her way, but of style she had none. She only about came up to Miss Lydia's shoulder; a slender girl, retiring in manner, shrinking from strangers, rather than courting them. Not but that her face was a very pleasant one: fair, gentle, with earnest blue eyes, ever smiling, and chiselled features; her fine, silky hair had a gold tinge on it. Dolly was kept

down by her imperious cousins; imperious to *her;* and remained in her place accordingly. She was accustomed to think of them as rich and fortunate young ladies, quite above herself. A sweet nature, a sunny temper, utterly unselfish, and ever ready to help all the world: such was Dolly Krane.

Three or four days after the ankle was injured, Miss Hamlet was able to use it again without much trouble, and she went in that evening, leaning upon Lydia's arm, to join the dinner in the public room.

"Dolly," cried the young lady in a tone of command, "you had better change your place for this one next to Aunt Charlotte. And then you will be at hand, you know, to help her to anything she may want."

Now, by a skilful arrangement of the mistress of the ceremonies, the elder people were placed together at the head of the table, and the younger ones at the foot; she had been young herself twenty years ago and knew what was what. And perhaps a sort of disappointment crossed Dolly's heart at being called away from the lively company of her own age, to sit with the sober elders. The feeling passed in a moment. Dolly had only lived to serve others, not to indulge herself, and she sat down by Miss Hamlet with a loving smile and cheerful brow.

"Let it be your place for good, Dolly," said Lydia, as she moved away to her own.

"Now I daresay, my dear, you would rather have stayed down there," said Miss Hamlet.

"Indeed I am glad to be with you, Aunt Charlotte," replied Dolly—for she had always called Miss Hamlet "aunt." "Please let me stay."

But by that wonderful law of compensation said to exist in this world, while Dolly was taking her soup, there glided quietly into the vacant seat beside her a tall, handsome, distinguished-looking man, whose face Dolly liked at the first glance; took a fancy to, in fact. It was a very attractive face, its features pale and regular, eyes, hair and whiskers of a dark brown, and a slight brown moustache.

Dolly passed him the salt. He thanked her, and that broke the ice. He began to talk to her, talked with her throughout dinner, and spoke a little across Dolly to Miss Hamlet. His English was very good indeed—a slightly foreign accent being distinguishable at times; and now and then he hesitated for a word. Once he used a wrong word, and Dolly laughed.

"What is it, mademoiselle?" he asked, laughing also. "What ought I to have said?"

Dolly told him. Though a retiring, modest girl, of innate refinement, she had none of the foolish shyness that some young girls have when conversing with strange gentlemen, and that some affect to have. And—she did not know how it was—but she felt as much at home with him as though she had known him for ten

years. He could not be mistaken for anything but a gentleman, and he was certainly a very attractive one.

The Miss Tafferels, looking on from the other end of the table, turned green with envy. Miss Lydia wished she had taken the seat by her aunt, instead of giving it to Dolly. "I wonder who he is?" thought she. "I suppose he came in by the five o'clock train." And when the company left the dining-room, Lydia ran to get a sly peep at the visitors'-book.

"The Baron de Fierreville."

"A baron! A real, live baron! French, of course!" Lydia Tafferel made a rush to her sisters, her cheeks glowing with excitement. There would be somebody worth dressing for now.

And from that evening the three young girls dressed in all their best. Feathers and flounces wonderful to behold, silks and ribbons and laces; and, though some people might have deemed them a little over-dressed, they looked very well.

The Baron de Fierreville did not appear in the drawing-rooms that first evening; but the young ladies made his acquaintance the following morning. It was a very hot day; they and Dolly were sitting on the beach under an awning, when he came strolling along with young Mr. Pender.

"Oh, there are those charming girls!" cried the young man. "Do let us join them!"

"You must present me, then," said the Baron.

Accordingly young Mr. Pender presented him—"The Baron de Fierreville." The three young ladies made each an elaborate curtsey: Dolly blushed and smiled.

But fate was not kind to young Mr. Pender. It came in the shape of his envious tutor to call him away. A grim tutor, who would not always be put down. So the young gentleman was borne off, and the Baron was left alone with the ladies. He sat down by Rosa, and they began to talk to him—all three of them, their questions tumbling out one upon another. There was no room for Dolly to put in a word, even had she wished to.

"How do you like Brightwater, Baron?"

"Don't you find the bathing excellent?"

"Why did you not come in to join the little dance last evening?"

"Do you like English girls?"

"How long do you think of staying?"

"I suppose you don't know all the people here yet? Those Miss Fitzroys are very nice. They had on blue net at dinner yesterday; perhaps you noticed them. Their father is Sir John Fitzroy, a half-pay colonel or admiral, or something: that old gentleman with a long white beard and a bald head."

"How very well you speak English, Baron! Did you come to England to learn it?"

"Are you a good sailor? I am a dreadful one."

"Do you like cruising about in a yacht?"

"Were you ever at Brighton?"

"In what part of France do you live?"

These and a hundred other queries the young ladies poured out. Dolly felt uncomfortable and blushed frequently. She could not have put such questions for the world; did not know how her cousins liked to do it. The Baron laughed and answered freely—as freely as the torrent of words permitted.

He had landed yesterday from a friend's yacht; had come over in her from Dieppe; his friend, Captain Close, after landing him, had put off again, was going further up the coast; he did not see, as yet, much to like in Brightwater, but believed he did like English girls; had noticed the young ladies in blue and thought them pretty; had sat outside in the moonlight last night smoking a cigar and talking with the young fellow's tutor, who had just left them; found him a most intellectual man; and so stayed there instead of going in to dance; his home was in Normandy, but for the past year he had been much away from it, travelling.

The girls listened eagerly to this, the substance of his answers. Lydia would have much liked to ask him how old he was, and whether he was a poor man or a rich one; but that would have been going a little too far, even for her.

"You have not told us, Baron," she said, "how you learnt to speak English so correctly. You have scarcely any accent at all. Did you learn it in England?"

"No, I learnt it at home: my mother was English," he answered. "She brought an English maid with her when she first came to our country, and when I was born the maid became my nurse. She is with us still—poor old Hannah!"

"At home, with your mother, do you mean?"

"Ah, no," he replied, a sadness creeping into his tone. "My mother is dead: nobody is in the old place now—save the servants. When I am at home now I am alone."

The young ladies noticed that he was in slight mourning, and concluded that he wore it for his mother. The conversation was becoming eminently satisfactory, for was not this an explicit avowal that the Baron was a bachelor. Lydia's lips had been twitching to ask whether he was or not, but it was perhaps too home a question and might have been misconstrued: and now it was answered without asking! How lucky! When men get to be thirty years of age—and he looked to be as much as that—one could never be at any certainty.

"Your father, I gather, is also dead, then, Baron?" she began again.

"He died many years ago."

The Baron got up and stepped away; perhaps he was tired of being asked questions; took a small telescope from his pocket, and stood

looking at the sea. Presently he put it up again, turned back to the bench, and sat down at the other end; which brought him next to Dolly. She was knitting a sock, and he began talking to her about it.

"For a little brother or sister, perhaps, mademoiselle?"

"Yes," said Dolly, her blue eyes brightening with the success of the guess, as she raised them to his. "I knit all the socks for two or three of the little ones. It is cheaper than buying, and they last longer."

"You have two or three brothers, then—or sisters, are they?"

"I have ever so many," laughed Dolly. "Four brothers, and four sisters; we are nine in all."

"Are you the eldest of them?"

"Yes, the very oldest. The four boys come after me, and then the little girls. Mamma often says she is thankful that I came before the boys."

"But why?"

"Oh, because I can help her; I can do so much for them all. A boy could not have done anything."

"So you are a very industrious young lady!"

"I have to be," said Dolly simply. "And oh, you don't know—you can't guess—how delightful it is to have a holiday, and to be at the seaside. I never saw the sea before; and now I wish I could always see it."

Dolly spoke out in her enthusiasm. Her eyes were bent on her knitting; she was thinking of home. The Baron's eyes were bent on her; and the other girls saw it.

"You had better go in now, Dolly," said Miss Lydia. "Aunt Charlotte may be wanting you." And Dolly took up her ball of wool, and went slowly off, knitting as she went.

"She is not your sister, is she, that young lady?" asked the Baron.

"Oh dear, no!" they all screamed at once, wondering at the little discernment of men, even of real French barons. They displayed an elaborate toilette in all the fashion of the day; Dolly had nothing on but a pink gingham, already washed to paleness. Their head-gear was bristling with feathers and steel bugles and cockatoo tufts; Dolly's straw hat had a bit of ribbon twisted round it. "Our sister! My dear Baron! how could you! She is only Dorothy Krane, a very distant cousin."

"Dorothy Krane," repeated the Baron. "Krane?"

"Yes, rather an odd name, is it not?—spelt with a K. We call her Dolly."

When Miss Hamlet heard that the newly arrived guest was a French baron she felt doubtful. "I think," she observed to her nieces, "that you had better not cultivate any acquaintance with him. He was very pleasant and affable last night at the dinner table; but it is well to hold foreigners at a distance."

"Good gracious, aunt!" exclaimed the young ladies. "Why, we have been talking to him out there all the morning!" For this conversation occurred on this same day when they came in at luncheon time.

"Especially foreign noblemen," went on Miss Hamlet; "barons and counts, and such like. It happens sometimes that the titles are only put on, and that those who assume them are but adventurers. I have heard tell of such things."

"Now, Aunt Charlotte! *can* you suppose such a thing of this one? His very looks, his manners might tell you he is a perfect gentleman."

"Some years ago, Lydia, a foreigner came to Stagbrook, and took the best rooms in the place. I forget his name; in fact, none of us ever quite got at its true pronunciation; it sounded like Crassaco, and that is what we called it—the Count de Crassaco. He seemed to be a gentleman, also perfect, as you phrase it, with black moustachios that curled upwards, and a lisp. He stayed three months in the place, the young villain, making love to all the girls, and winning their brothers' money at pool, and cards, and billiards; and he ran away at last without paying for his rooms, or for any of the provisions that had been furnished by the tradespeople. Now that's true, girls; and I have suspected titled foreigners ever since."

The girls laughed. "Did he make love to you, Aunt Charlotte?"

"No, I was too old for him, I expect," said Aunt Charlotte good-humouredly. "I was between thirty and forty then: it must be fifteen years ago. But that is all true, I say. I would have you bear it in mind, and not allow this Baron de Feverel to drift into any intimacy with you."

"De Fierreville, aunt; not Feverel."

"It comes to the same. For the matter of that, it may not be his name at all. Just recollect one thing, my dears, that he is here without any introduction—any friend to answer for him or countenance him."

"He landed from Captain Close's yacht, he told us," remarked Rosa.

"Just so," said the elder lady; "but Captain Close—if there is such a person—did not stay to confirm this, or his yacht either. He may have landed from the excursion steamer; one touched here yesterday afternoon, you know; and not from any yacht at all. What are you looking so serious about, Dolly?"

"I was only thinking, Aunt Charlotte, that he *is* what he seems—what he says," replied Dolly. "He has a truthful face and voice; I don't think he *could* be deceitful. And I was also trying to recollect where I have heard the name—de Fierreville. When young Mr. Pender mentioned it this morning, it struck me as being somehow not quite strange to me."

"Any way, I desire that you will all be upon your guard," concluded Aunt Charlotte.

To which advice the Miss Tafferels took care not to listen. "Dolly's right in that. You can't doubt him," they said to one another. "If a prince came down here, aunt, in her old-fashioned notions, would tell us not to dance with him!"

And henceforth the three Miss Tafferels took the Baron under their especial charge. Other young ladies staying at the hotel could hardly get near him. They sat by him at dinner, Dolly being displaced—Lydia to-day, Rosa to-morrow, Julia the next day. They surrounded him in the day time; they talked to him under the light of the moon. Twice over they got him to take them for a sail. One thing they did not yet succeed in—getting him to dance. When the quadrilles and waltzes were going on at night, the Baron would be out of doors with that objectionable tutor, who was over middle age and wore spectacles. The Miss Tafferels did not like the learned man at all. What right had musty old scholars to be at a gay watering-place?

Another who did not much frequent the dancing-room was Dolly; but this was no fault of hers. Miss Hamlet disapproved of indiscriminate dancing, as she did of indiscriminate flirting; and Dolly was only allowed to sit by and look on. "Your papa would not approve of it, any more than I do, my dear," said Miss Hamlet, evening by evening, to Dolly.

The Baron accepted the patronage of the Miss Tafferels calmly, giving as much attention to one sister as to another. Being the Baron de Fierreville (unless Miss Hamlet's doubts were true), and a very good-looking and agreeable man, the chances were that he was no stranger to the homage of young ladies.

Thus a week wore on. Miss Hamlet, finding her nieces did *not* keep the Baron at a respectful distance, in spite of her advice, washed her hands of them for giddy, silly girls, and rather hoped that some fine morning, upon getting up, it would be found that the Baron had disappeared during the night, as well as the hotel forks and spoons. It would teach them what foreigners were worth.

"You, Dolly, will at any rate obey me," Miss Hamlet said, "and keep yourself out of the way of that Frenchman." But Dolly had no need of the injunction. She felt so ashamed of the way her relatives set upon him, that she never willingly went within range of his sight, putting aside the fact that the Miss Tafferels took care she should not go.

Some days went on. One morning, when the sun was pouring down on the beach, the three girls stood there, hoping for the presence of the Baron. Presently he loomed into view, side by side with that silent, uninteresting, spectacled tutor.

"Is it not hot, Baron?" exclaimed Lydia.

"Very," replied the Baron. "It will be broiling by-and-by."

"But you say you don't care for the heat, you know," put in Rosa. "You say you like it."

"I like hot weather; it is nearly sure to be sunny weather. Some-

times it is too hot for me. We now and then get quite tropical heat here, just a few days of it; not every summer, though."

"We had some of it last year, I remember," said Julia. "It was in June."

"I remember it, too," he slowly replied, his eyes taking a thoughtful look over the sea. "We were in Switzerland. It was hot; we could hardly bear it."

"You say 'we,' Baron," commented Miss Lydia. "Are you speaking of your mother?"

"Oh, no. Of my wife."

"Your—wife?" repeated Lydia, in a kind of choking tone. "Did you say your *wife?*"

"Yes," he answered, turning to her. "My poor mother died long before that."

Now I will leave the intelligent reader to judge of the effect this avowal had on the Baron's fair hearers. He went strolling farther down the beach with the tutor, and the three young ladies made their comments.

"What a *shameful* thing!"

"To be staying here under *false* pretences!"

"Aunt Charlotte is right. These foreigners are nearly all of them *pretenders.*"

"He has come cruising off in that yacht from Dieppe to amuse himself, leaving his poor wife to the solitude of the château! And he flirts here and flirts there, never giving the smallest hint that he is a married man—*suppressing* it, in fact. Oh, it is infamous!"

"Stay a moment, Lydia. Don't you remember he said one day he was alone at home; that the château contained only two or three old servants?"

"It is all of a piece," retorted Lydia. "He is starring it here under false colours. And if his wife is not left to the home solitude, she is starring it somewhere upon her own account, take my word for that. Small blame to her, as Mrs. O'Malley says. Serves him right! Well, I do hate and despise deliberate deceit! A special pillory ought to be invented for it."

The young ladies went indoors. In a tacit sort of way they united to hide their mortification, and to say nothing of the discovery. Let some of the other girls get taken in! As if to reward their magnanimity, a troop of fresh male guests arrived that day at the hotel, two of them looking particularly eligible; so the Baron was left in peace by the Miss Tafferels.

The following morning, when they had gone for a drive with their aunt, Dolly took her knitting and sat down under the awning on the beach. It was a lovely day, not quite so hot as yesterday; the sun shone on the sands, but it was tempered by a breeze that blew over the sea. Children were playing about, young men and women strolled by the rocks, picking up shells and seaweed. Out at sea, a few

white sails glittered in the sun; a distant steamer passed smoothly along, seeming to touch the horizon. A dainty yacht was making towards the little landing-place; some fishing smacks were putting out. It was a charming picture of life at the sea-shore; a life which is healthy because it is pleasant, and pleasant in that it is lazy.

"Oh, how delightful it is!" breathed Dolly aloud, when she had gazed long at the scene. "If I could but see it always! If we did but live near the sea!"

"Sometimes the sea is gloomy and rough," said a voice at her elbow. "How would you like it then, Miss Krane?"

He came into view from behind the awning, and sat down, the Baron de Fierreville, startling Dolly. She had seen him go off by an omnibus after breakfast, and did not know he was back again.

"I think I should like it always," she answered, with deprecation. "Rough or smooth, the sea must be always beautiful. We cannot have fair weather every day, and must take the bad with the good."

"Ay; that's philosophy. How is it that you have run away from me of late?"

Dolly blushed to the tips of her busy fingers. "I have a good deal to do for Aunt Hamlet; she wants me to read to her, and to give her my arm when she walks," answered Dolly.

"Where are your cousins this morning?"

"They are gone out for a drive with my aunt."

"Was there not room for you?"

"Not any," said Dolly. "I should have made five. It would have crushed their new cambric dresses."

Dolly's dress this morning was a simple cotton with pretty blue sprigs upon it. The Baron sat in silence for a few moments looking at her, so unpretending, so fresh and fair, with her clear, pleasant face shaded by its beautiful hair.

"Do you like your cousins?" he asked.

"Oh, very much. They are truly kind, and they give me a great many things. Did you notice—but of course you did not. How foolish I am!"

"Now please tell me what you were going to say, Miss Krane. Did I notice what?"

Dolly blushed again. "You must forgive me; I spoke without thought. It was only whether you happened to notice a new silk dress I came down to dinner in yesterday. Julia gave it me. It was hers, and she said I might alter it for myself, for people must be tired of seeing me in the grey. Oh, they are very kind, very nice; you would like them better and better the more you knew of them."

"They are rich, I suppose?"

"Well, yes: rich, at least, as compared with me. Aunt Charlotte says they are giddy and talk too much," added Dolly, hoping to

offer an excuse for the young ladies' behaviour to her hearer. "But they will remedy that, you know, as they get older."

The Baron laughed. "You young ladies don't put old heads on your shoulders yet awhile, do you, Miss Krane? Why, I suppose you are not more than nineteen?"

Dolly looked up in surprise. "I am twenty-two."

He suppressed a smile.

"Is your father a clergyman?" he asked after a pause.

"Yes. He is the Rector of Stagbrook."

"The Reverend Abel Krane?"

"Yes," repeated Dolly, wondering.

"I thought it might be so; the name, Krane, is not a very common one, you see. I believe I know him. Rather more than a year ago he was doing duty in Switzerland. I was staying there, and made acquaintance with him."

"It is quite true!" said Dolly, her face beaming with delight. "Papa had nearly broken down with the home work, and somebody kindly got him a chaplaincy abroad for a month, and he went there with mamma. And I am sure now that I have heard him mention you. I thought the name was familiar to my ears. How glad I am!"

Dolly could not have defined why she was glad: partly, perhaps, at meeting some one who knew her father; partly at the conviction this brought her that Miss Hamlet's doubts were without foundation, that the Baron was what he appeared to be.

"And now you will no longer be afraid of me, or look upon me as a five-tailed bashaw," quoth he, smiling.

Dolly blushed hotly. "Did you see much of papa?—did you like him?"

"I liked him, indeed; but I did not see much of him. I was at the place but a week or ten days."

"Halloa, de Fierreville! Won't you come for a sail? It's a glorious day for it."

The interruption was made by some of the gentlemen staying at the hotel. The Baron rose, said good morning to Dolly, and went to them.

Dolly found herself quite at liberty now to stroll out when she would, and to talk to the Baron, if he chose to talk to her; her cousins no longer interfered to prevent it. Very often indeed, when she was sitting on the beach, or under the rocks, or strolling on the sands to pick up shells for the young ones at home, did he join her; and somehow Dolly grew to love the meetings.

One evening at sunset a yacht put in. Its owner, Captain Close, came to the hotel and found his friend the Baron. After dinner, when Miss Hamlet was sitting out of doors in the soft twilight, a fleecy white shawl on her shoulders, Captain Close, throwing away the end of his cigar, chanced to sit down in the next chair.

"You are not with the dancers, sir," said Miss Hamlet, wishing to be sociable.

"Not to night, ma'am. The young ladies might hardly care to dance with a man in a rough pilot jacket. I only came up to find de Fierreville, and did not put myself ship-shape."

All in a moment it struck Miss Hamlet that she could not do better than question this sailor, with the frank speech and honest, weather-beaten face, about the Baron. And she did so.

"Is he what he passes for, would you ask?" repeated Captain Close, in much surprise, when he had listened. "He is George, Baron de Fierreville just as surely as that I am Richard Close, commander in Her Majesty's navy—for I am not captain yet, worse luck, though people give me the title on shore. Why, what else did you take him for, ma'am?"

Miss Hamlet made a few apologies, explaining a little that cautious people did not, as a rule, put absolute trust in barons and counts, when they were unknown; that such gentlemen lived by their wits; and she wound up by asking whether the Baron in question was poor.

"That's as may be; people's notions on riches differ, you must know, ma'am," said the sailor. "The Fierreville estates bring in two thousand pounds clear yearly; and that's an uncommon good income for France, though it might not be thought much of here at home. Added to that, there was a great deal of money that had accumulated between the late Baron's death and this one's coming of age, which is placed, as I chance to know, in good securities. Oh, yes, he is well off; wish I had half as much."

"You appear to know him well, sir."

"I do, ma'am; have known him ever since he was in petticoats. There was some distant relationship between my people and his late mother, who was a Close before she married; though I'll be shot if I know what it was; and I've often stayed at Château Fierreville. It's a fine place."

All this was genuine truth; and Miss Hamlet, wishing to be just, informed her three nieces, before going to bed, that she found she had misjudged the Baron, who was a real baron and not an adventurer.

The young ladies threw their heads into the air. "All the same," they said to one another, "he is doing Brightwater under abominably false colours."

Early the next morning Captain Close's yacht went out, carrying the Baron with it. And he had never condescended to take leave of anybody! "Just the manners that might be expected of him!" exclaimed Lydia.

Dolly was pacing the terrace in the twilight, feeling very down at heart, for which she could not at all account, the others being in the dancing-room, when she saw the Baron approach from the

beach. At first she was not sure but it might be his ghost; and what with that, or something else, every pulse she possessed began to beat at fever-heat.

"I thought you had left," she said, timidly.

"Surely not! We have been out for a day's sail. Close wants to carry me off to-morrow for good," he added, "but I tell him I am not ready."

Dolly looked up at the stars, just making their appearance in the sky. She had nothing to say in answer. He had turned to walk by her side.

"How much longer will your party be staying here, do you suppose, Miss Krane?"

"Only two or three days," sighed Dolly. "We have been here nearly four weeks."

"Shall you be sorry to leave?"

"Oh, very. For some things," added Dolly, quickly—"the sea, and the holiday life. But I shall be very glad to go home again. I cannot think what my mother has done without me."

"What will she do without you—later?"

"Later!" echoed Dolly, not understanding.

"When you marry."

Hot blushes dyed her cheeks. "That will never be," she answered, when she could speak quietly. "I am not likely to marry."

"Do you think not? Why?"

"I do not suppose anybody will ask me."

"But why not, Miss Dolly? Come, please tell me."

"For one thing, there is not anybody in Stagbrook who would be in the least likely to—I can't remember one—not that I have thought about it—or—at all suitable," stammered Dolly, obedient, as usual, but wishing he would not say things to confuse her. "And for another thing——" She came to a standstill.

"Well, what is the other thing?"

"I mean that I have not any money: not any at all. You must pardon me for saying these things. I don't care to speak of them—if you will please not to question me."

He laughed a little. "How would you like to live in France?" he asked. "In a large and pleasant house not far from the sea—which can be seen from its windows."

The tone he spoke in was very peculiar—curiously tender; and Dolly blushed hotly.

"I—I must go in," she said. "Aunt Charlotte will be angry with me."

But the Baron did not let her go. He caught her hand as she was turning, and stood holding it in his.

"Why do you want to run away from me, Miss Dolly? Do you know that I left Close and the yacht on purpose to come to *you*? Let me tell you a little about this house in France."

Four or five young men loomed on the terrace, smoking their cigars. Seeing the Baron, they called to him, and Dolly escaped indoors.

"Come back, has he?" commented Miss Lydia Tafferel. "He might have stayed away, for all the ornament he is here, or the good he does us."

"My dear, don't be severe," reproved Aunt Charlotte. "At one time you seemed, all three of you, to think the Baron was an angel, if I may apply the word to a young man. Latterly you have been almost rude to him."

"Well, aunt, and with cause. Here he came, flourishing amidst us, never saying who he was or what he was; passing himself off for a bachelor ——"

"Stay a moment, Lydia. You talk too fast. How did he 'pass himself off' for a bachelor? I suppose you mean that you girls took up the notion that he was one?"

"Anyway, he did not say he was a married man," fired Lydia. "He ought to have let it be known that he was. It was a piece of audacious deceit."

"Is he married?"

"He is. He began talking to us the other day about his wife."

"And pray, my dears, what possible difference can it make to you whether he is married or not?" demanded Aunt Charlotte, looking at them over her spectacles. "You would not, any one of you, think of a French baron for yourselves, I expect—not even you, Lydia."

"*Of course not!*" retorted Lydia, with emphasis. "You don't understand things, Aunt Charlotte. The world is becoming too much advanced for you."

"I think its young people are," retorted Aunt Charlotte; and she said no more. But Dolly, listening to this from a distant corner, turned as white as a sheet. Her dream was over.

So that she was not very much pleased when she saw the Baron coming towards her the following afternoon. Dolly had her full share of good sense, as of proper pride, and she knew that the Baron de Fierreville, a married man, had not spoken to her like a gentleman the previous evening on the terrace; no, nor at one or two other times. Miss Hamlet and the girls were gone for a drive again. Dolly did not often get a chance of going; and she took the zig-zag, circuitous path to a seat in the middle of the rocks—a solitary place, rarely invaded by the visitors. But the Baron must have watched her, for presently she saw him climbing up perpendicularly. Fright put other things out of her head.

"Oh, pray, pray do not try to come up that way!" she cried out in an agony, expecting every moment to see him fall backwards. "Oh, why will you do it?"

But he gained the ledge and the seat without mishap. There were rocks near his own home, and he had climbed them from a child.

"Did you fear for me?" he asked in a low, sweet tone.

Dolly was very pale. "I thought it a hazardous thing to do," she answered. "I think it still."

"But I wanted to come to you. I want to tell you about my home in France—we were interrupted by those men last night. Do you think you should feel altogether unhappy if I asked you to come and live in it with me, Miss Dolly?"

Dolly put her work into its little basket, and rose from her seat to depart. "Baron de Fierreville," she stayed to say, her very lips becoming whiter, "will you allow me to ask what your wife would think of this, could she hear you?"

"But she can't hear me," said the Baron, staring.

Dolly burst into tears of agitation. "Be so good as to let me pass, sir. I took you for a gentleman; I did indeed; and you told me you knew and esteemed my father!"

"But what do you mean?" he asked, in astonishment. "How have I offended you?"

"It has been all very bad—on your part," retorted Dolly, in trembling accents. "To excuse yourself by saying to my face that your wife cannot hear you is worst of all."

"Why, how can she hear?" persisted the Baron. "The Roman Catholics believe that the saints and angels hear our prayers: I am not sure but we Protestants do. If my poor wife could hear every word I have ever said to you, she would rejoice rather than be sad. Nearly the last words she breathed to me contained a hope that I should find another wife to love me as she had loved."

It was now Dolly's turn to stare, as she took in what this implied. "Is your wife dead?" she faltered.

"She will have been dead a year on the thirtieth of this month," said the Baron. "Did you not know she was dead?"

"No," gasped Dolly, "I heard last night that she was living. Please forgive me for showing anger."

He drew her back to the seat beside him, put his arm round her waist, perhaps by way of support, and let her have her cry out.

"Your father and mother could have told you, my dear, that when they saw my wife with me in Switzerland she was nearly in the last stage of consumption. All hope of recovery was then over. And, Dolly, I feel sure they like me; I think they will not mind your coming home to the château."

For the first time that evening the Baron appeared in the dancing-room. He approached Dolly sitting nearly behind the window-curtain. "You will give me a dance," he whispered.

"I do not know what Aunt Charlotte would say," breathed Dolly in answer.

"I will make peace with Aunt Charlotte. Come! Why," laughing, as she still hesitated, "a short while, and you will have to obey me of right. Remember that, my darling."

Nobody could believe their eyes. The Baron in the room at last, treading a measure with Dolly Krane! With Dolly Krane, of all people! The measure was a waltz, and Dolly's pretty white skirts, for she had put on her best robe that evening, floated about her as she moved round in the Baron's arms, and her eyes were cast down timidly, and her face was blushing.

Miss Hamlet had never been so much surprised in all her life as she was that evening, when, being alone in the little card-room, she found the Baron de Fierreville, bowing deeply before her, à la mode Française, telling her that Dolly had promised to be his wife. And that when she, Miss Hamlet, left Brightwater with the young ladies the next day but one, he should beg permission to accompany them on his way to Stagbrook Rectory, to explain matters to the Reverend Mr. Krane and his wife, and to ask them to part with Dolly.

"A French baron!" gasped Miss Hamlet to her nieces, when they got into the privacy of her own room. "Oh dear! I said I did not know what would come of it."

The young ladies turned all manner of colours, and made their comments on the Baron with characteristic freedom.

"Not married!" they shrieked in chorus. "A widower! His wife been dead a year!—why, then, did he lead people to suppose she was *not* dead?—to speak of her, as he once did to us, as *living?* Oh, what a wicked man!—an accomplished deceiver! We wish you joy of your prize, Dorothy Krane!"

CAKES AND ALE.

Back, back, three hundred years to scenes romantic,
"The spacious times of Great Elizabeth!"
Fresh blows the breeze across the blue Atlantic,
With "Westward Ho!" to glory or to death.
Talk flows at Court in softest "Sydneian showers,"
Not yet is Essex' doom or Raleigh's fall—
And see, he comes, through English meadow flowers,
Will Shakspeare, worthiest, dearest loved of all!

Where'er he deigns to lead we gladly follow,
In court or camp we dream of love and war;
Stray, where the ocean ridges, breaking hollow,
Cast Naples' Prince upon the enchanted shore.
Of love and war! we catch young whispering voices
Mixed with the music in Verona gay;
Or join the shout when England's host rejoices
For Victory, won upon St. Crispin's day!

See in what goodly company he sets us:
Ladies and courtiers, why, we know them all!
Their doors stand open wide, and nothing lets us,
Would we in palace hold high festival—
'Mid fair Italian gardens take our leisure
In gay companionship of Prince or Peer:
Or rather taste the simpler-minded pleasure
Of humble cakes and ale and country cheer.

Ay, this in faith is very gracious fooling!
Let us sit down and view the world at ease;
Prince Hal is here, not yet grown sage with ruling,
We drink 'neath Justice Shallow's apple-trees.
Let the October brew be brisk and mellow,
Sir John, Sir Toby will be here anon;
Bring out the warden pies, stained saffron yellow,
And simnels set with raisins o' the sun.

Gay times are these! we win a graceful greeting
From Perdita among her shepherd train,
Watch the Athenian actors' woodland meeting,
And bid the gentle Lion "roar again!"
Gay times indeed! with laughter still in favour,
Jesting not yet proscribed without the pale;
Were they less virtuous that they liked the flavour,
Our Foresires, of these merry Cakes and Ale?

The lines were broader, clearer for your guiding,
Lasses and lads, three hundred years ago—
You laughed for joy of heart and wept for chiding,
Your lives in simpler channels seemed to flow.
We school our faces, teach our tongues to utter
Smooth things, not always Truth's unvarnished tale;
In fact we've grown too fine for bread and butter,
And far too virtuous for Cakes and Ale!

G. B. Stuart.

M. ELLEN EDWARDS.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1881.

COURT NETHERLEIGH.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ROBERT DALRYMPLE.

SUNDRY shouts startling the night air, combined with the dashing up of horsemen, caused no little stir amidst the crowd of malcontents hovering round Moat Grange. The booming of the alarm bell had been less ominous than this.

They were the police officers from Netherleigh, sent for by Oscar Dalrymple, and they had come mounted for the sake of speed. The moon had gone behind a cloud, the old structure, Moat Grange, appeared shadowy and indistinct, and to the imaginations of these poor excited labourers, assembled to discuss their position, the three officers—for there were but three—looked magnified into a formidable number. Sir Francis Netherleigh had appeased their anger, but he could not subdue the sense of wrong that rankled in the men's minds; and when he left them, they, instead of dispersing quietly in accordance with his recommendation, lingered where they were, and whispered together of Pinnett and of treason.

On the other side the house was a group, more peaceful, but not a whit less excited. Of all the surprises met with by Francis Netherleigh in his own life, he had never had so complete a one as this, or one so satisfactory. Searching about after malcontents that might have scattered themselves, he came round by the out-houses and the kitchen gardens; and there he saw a stranger talking with his sister Mary, Farmer Lee and Reuben standing at a little distance. The moon was now bright; the stranger stood bare-headed, and there was that in his form and the outlines of his face that thrilled a chord in the memory of Sir Francis.

"Don't be frightened, sir," spoke Farmer Lee to him in whispered tones, as befitted the wonderful subject, "it is himself, and not his ghost. It is indeed."

"But *who* is it?" cried Sir Francis, his eyes strained earnestly on the stranger.

"Himself, I say, sir—Robert Dalrymple."

"Robert Dalrymple!"

"Ay. Come back from the dead, as one may say. He made himself known to me and Reuben; and then I went and broke the news to Miss Mary. And there they both are, talking together."

But Mary had discerned her brother, and they were coming forward. "Can I believe it?" asked Sir Francis, as they met, his hand clasping Robert's with a warm grasp.

"I think you may; I think you cannot fail to recognise me, changed and aged though I know I am," answered Robert, with an emotion that bordered upon tears.

"You have been alive all this time—and not dead, as we have deplored you!"

"Yes; and I never knew, until a little while ago, that I was looked upon as dead."

"But what became of you, Robert? It was thought, that dreadful night, that you ——"

"Threw myself into the Thames," put in Robert, in the slight pause made by Sir Francis. They were standing all together now, Mary a little apart, with her hand upon the gate, and the moonlight flickered on them through the branches of the thinning autumn trees. "I was very near doing it," he continued; "nearer than anyone, save God, can know. It was a dreadful night to me, one of shame and despair. Knowing myself to be irretrievably ruined, a rogue upon earth ——"

"Hold there, sir," cried Reuben, "a rogue you never were."

"I was, Reuben. And you shall all hear how. Mary"—turning to her—"you shall hear also. A beggar myself, I staked that night at the gaming-table the money I held of yours, Lee, the five-hundred pounds you had entrusted to me; staked it, and lost it. I cannot understand how you—but I'll leave that just now. The money gone, I wandered about the streets, a desperate man, and found myself on Westminster Bridge. It was in my heart to take the leap into the river, the blind leap into futurity that my uncle had taken before me. I was almost in the very act of doing it, when a passer-by, seeing my perilous position, pulled me back, and asked what I meant by hanging over there. It is to him I owe my life."

"Under God," breathed Mary.

"Ay," assented Robert, "under God. It proved to be one Joseph Horn, a young man employed at my tailor's, and he recognised me. I made an excuse about the heat of the night—that I was leaning over for a breath of air from the water; and finally Horn left me. But the incident had served to arrest my purpose; to show me my folly and my sin. I—I am not ashamed to confess that I knelt

down, there and then, to ask God to save me from myself—and He did it. I quitted the dangerous spot ——"

"Your hat was found in the Thames, and brought back the next day, Mr. Robert," interrupted poor, bewildered, happy Reuben.

"It blew off, into the river; it was one of the windiest nights I was ever out in, save at sea," answered Robert. "I walked about the streets till morning, taking myself sharply to task, and considering how I could give myself a chance for a better life. I had still my watch and ring, both of value—they would have gone long before, just as everything else had gone, but that they had been my father's and were given over by him to me on his death-bed. I parted with them now, disguised myself in rough clothes, went to Liverpool, and thence to South America."

"But why did not you come to me instead?" asked Sir Francis.

"I was ashamed to do so. Look at the debts I owed; at what I had done with Lee's money! No, there was nothing for it but to hide my head from you all, and from the world. Had I made a fortune, I should have come back in triumph, but I never did make it. I got employment as a clerk at New Orleans, and kept myself; that was all."

"If you had but just let us know you were alive, Robert!" cried Mary.

He shook his head. "I did not suppose anyone would care to know it. I expected that the extent of my villainy had come out, and that you would all be thankful if I disappeared for ever. So there I remained, in the Crescent City, passing as 'Mr. Charles,' my second name, and making the best of my blighted life. I"—his tone suddenly changing to laughter—"nearly married and settled there."

"Oh!"—Mary gave quite a start.

"I had an excellent offer; yes, I assure you I had. It was leap-year. A flourishing widow, some few years older than myself, took a fancy to me. She had a fine house and grounds on the banks of the Mississippi, and an income not to be despised; and she proposed that I should throw up my wearisome daily work and become the master of all this—and of her. I took it into consideration, I can tell you."

"And what prevented your acceptance of it?" laughed Sir Francis.

"Well, the one bare thought; it did not amount to hope; that a turn of good fortune *might* some time bring me back here, to find"—with a glance at Mary—"what I have found."

"And the turn of fortune came, sir—and has brought you back!" exclaimed the farmer.

"Yes, it did come," replied Robert; "a turn that was very like romance, and once more exemplified the saying that truth is stranger than fiction.—You are aware, I think, that my father had a relative living in Liverpool, Benjamin Dalrymple?" he added, chiefly addressing Sir Francis—who nodded in reply.

"Benjamin Dalrymple never corresponded with us, would not notice us; a difference had arisen between him and my father in early days; but a year after my father's death I, chancing to be in Liverpool, called upon him. He was cordial enough with me, seemed rather to take a fancy to me, and I stayed with him three weeks. He was a cotton broker, and would take me down to his office of a morning, and show me his routine of business, verily hoping, I believe, that I should take to it and join him. When, later, I became hard up, and had not a shilling to turn to in the world, I wrote to Benjamin Dalrymple from London, asking him to help me. Not by the smallest fraction, he replied; a young man who could run into debt with my patrimony, would run into debt to the end of the chapter, though his income might number tens of thousands. Well, all that passed away; and—" Robert paused.

"The house I served in South America exported cotton home in large quantities," he continued rapidly; "Benjamin Dalrymple was amongst their larger correspondents. Some few months ago his confidential clerk, a taciturn gentleman named Patten, came over on business to New Orleans, to this very same house I was in. He saw me, and recognized me: we had dined together more than once at old Benjamin's table in Liverpool. Patten had believed me dead; drowned; and it no doubt gave him a turn when he saw me alive. I told him my history, asking him not to let it transpire in the old world or the new. But, it seems, he considered it his duty to repeat it to old Benjamin on his return home; and he did so. The result was, that Benjamin set up a correspondence with me, and finally commanded me to give up my place as clerk and go back to him. I did so; and I—I—" again Robert paused: this time in evident emotion.

"Go on, Robert," said Sir Francis. "What is it?"

"My story has so sad an ending," answered Robert, his tone depressed. "I landed at Liverpool to find Benjamin Dalrymple ill with a mortal illness. He had been ailing for some time, but the fatal truth had declared itself then. He was so changed, too!—I suppose people do change when they are about to die. From being a cold, hard man, he had become gentle and loving in manner. I must remain with him until the end, he said, and be to him as a son."

"Was he not married, sir?" asked Farmer Lee.

"He had never married. I did remain with him, doing what I could for him, and making him no end of promises, which he exacted, with regard to my future life and conduct. In twenty-one days, exactly, from the day I landed, the end came."

"He died?"

"He died. I waited for his funeral. And," concluded Robert, modestly, "he has made me his heir."

"Thank heaven for that," murmured old Reuben.

"How much it is I cannot tell you," said Robert, "but an

enormous sum. Patten puts it down at half a million: and that, after clerks and other dependants have been provided for. So, everybody who has ever suffered by me in the shape of debt will be recompensed; and Moat Grange will hold its own again."

But his return had to be made known to those interested: his mother, his sisters, Oscar Dalrymple. Of the latter Robert spoke some hard words.

"I had thought to give him a fair portion of this wealth in right of Selina," avowed he. "But I don't know now. A man who can so oppress an estate does not merit much favour."

"Oscar has been worse thought of than he deserves," said Sir Francis. "Rely upon that, Robert. He has been sorely tried and put to for money for some few years now, through no fault of his own ——"

"No; through Selina's," interrupted Robert. "Old Benjamin knew all about it."

"He has been striving to make both ends meet, to pay his obligations justly and honourably, and he could only do it by dint of screwing," went on Sir Francis. "The great mistake of his later life was leasing the estate to Pinnett. It is thought that he could have stopped Pinnett's harsh acts; my opinion is that he could not."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Robert, cordially. "Oscar was always near, but he was just."

They were moving slowly through the garden to the house, when a disturbance struck upon their ears. It came from the front of the Grange; and all, save Mary, hastened round to the scene. It was, in fact, the moment of the arrival of the mounted police. The officers shouted, the crowd rebelled; and Oscar Dalrymple ran out. The police, hasty as usual, were for taking up the malcontents wholesale; the latter resisted, protesting they had done nothing to be taken up for. They had only come up to speak to Mr. Dalrymple, and there was no law against that.

"You break the law when you use threats to a man in his own house," cried Featherston, the chief constable.

"We haven't used any threats," retorted Dyke. "We want an answer from Mr. Dalrymple: whether he's going to force us to lodge under the wind and the rain, or whether he'll find us roofs in place o' them he has destroyed. They've bid us go to the workus; but he knows that if we go there we lose all chance of getting our living, and shall never have a home for our families again."

"There's no longer room for you on the estate: no dwellings for you left upon it," spoke up a voice; and the men turned sharply, for they knew it was Pinnett's. Countenanced by the presence of the constables, the agent came out from some shelter or other, and showed himself openly.

"We won't say nothing about mercy," savagely cried Dyke; "but we'd like justice. Justice, sir!" turning to Oscar Dalrymple, as he stood by the side of Mr. Cleveland, who had just come up. "Hands

off, Mr. Constable! I'm doing nothing yet, save asking a plain question. *Is* there any justice?"

"Yes, there is justice," interrupted another voice, which thrilled through the very marrow of Oscar Dalrymple, as Robert advanced and took his place near Mr. Cleveland, who started back in positive fright. "Oscar, you know me, I see; gentlemen, some of you know me: I am Robert Dalrymple, and I have returned to claim my own."

Was it a spectre? Many of them looked as if they feared so. Featherston, brave constable though he was, backed away in terror.

"I find you have all thought me dead," proceeded Robert, "but I am not dead, and I never have been dead: I have simply been abroad. I got into debt and difficulty; but, now that the difficulties are over, I come amongst you again."

"It's the Squire!" burst forth the men, as they gradually awoke to the truth; "we've never called the other one so. Our own young Squire's come home again, and our troubles are over. Good luck to the ship that brought him!"

Robert laughed. "Yes, your troubles shall be over. I hear that there has been dissatisfaction; and, perhaps, oppression. I can only say that I will set everything right. The tenants who have been served with a notice to quit"—glancing round at Lee and Bumford—"may burn it: and you, my poor fellows, who have been ejected from your cottages, shall be reinstalled in them."

"But my dear young master," called out Dyke, despondingly, "some o' the roofs are off, and the walls pretty nigh levelled with the ground."

"I will build them up for you, Dyke, stronger than ever," said Robert, heartily. "Here's my hand upon it."

Not only Dyke, but many more pressed forward to clasp Robert's hands; and so hard and earnest were the pressures that Robert was almost tempted to cry for quarter. In the midst of this Pinnett thought it time to speak.

"You talk rather fast, sir: even if you are Mr. Robert Dalrymple. The estate is mine for some seven years to come. It has been leased to me by its owner."

"That it certainly has not," returned Robert, his tone one of conscious power. "I am its owner. The estate has been mine throughout; as I did not die it could not have lapsed from me. My brother-in-law, acting under a mistake, entered into possession, but he has never been the legal owner. Consequently, whatever acts he may have ordered, performed, or sanctioned become NULL and VOID. Constables, I think your services will not be required here."

Pinnett ground his teeth. "It's to know whether you *are* Robert Dalrymple—and not an impostor."

"I can certify that it is really Robert Dalrymple; I baptised him," laughed Mr. Cleveland. "There is no mistaking him and his handsome face."

"And I and Mr. Lee can swear to it, if you like," put in Reuben, looking at Pinnett. "So could the rest of us. I wish we were all as sure of heaven!"

Robert put his hand into Oscar's under cover of the darkness. "You know me, Oscar, well enough. Let us be friends. I have not come home to sow discord: rather peace and goodwill. The Grange must be mine again; I can't help that; but when you and Selina quit it for your own place you shall not go empty handed."

"I don't understand you," returned Oscar.

"I have come back a rich man; and you shall participate in the good. Next to endowing my mother, I shall take care of my sisters. Ah, Oscar, these past few years have been full of gloom and trouble for many of us. Now that the clouds have broken, let us hope that the future will be all sunshine."

The assemblage began to disperse. Mr. Cleveland undertook to break the glad news to Mrs. Dalrymple and Selina.

Reuben crept up to his master with an anxious, troubled face. "Mr. Robert," he breathed, "have you quite left off the—the PLAY? You will not be tempted to take to it again?"

"Never, Reuben," was the grave answer. "That night, which you all thought fatal to me, and which was so near being so, as I stood on the bridge, looking down on the dark water, I took a solemn oath that I would never again touch a card, or any other incentive to gambling. I never shall."

"Heaven be praised!" murmured Reuben. And the old man felt that he was ready to say with Simeon of old: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A WEDDING.

WINTER had come, and passed; and spring flowers and sunshine gladdened the land.

In my Lady Acorn's dressing-room at Chenevix House stood my lady herself, her head and hands shaking with temper, her tart tongue in loud assertion. Opposite to her, the same blonde, suave dame that she had ever been, waited Madame Damereau. Madame was not tart, or rude, she could not be that; but nevertheless she maintained her own cause, and gave my lady answer for answer.

Every available place in the room was covered with a robe, bonnet, mantle, or some other choice article essential to a lady's attire: on the sofa itself lay a costly bridal dress. You might have fancied it the show-room of Madame Damereau. Lady Frances Chenevix was to be married on the morrow to Gerard Hope. The Colonel had been telling them both ever since Christmas that he

thought they ought to fix the day if they meant to marry at all, and so arrangements were made, and they named one early in April.

The articles, lying about, formed part of the trousseau of Lady Frances; and the grievance distracting Lady Acorn was connected with them: for she saw a great many more spread out than she had ordered, and was giving way to wrath. Madame Damereau condescending to appear at Chenevix House this afternoon, to superintend herself the trying on of the bridal robe, arrived just in time to come in for its benefit. The genial spring sunshine stole in through the windows and shone on them and on the glittering goods.

"Was anything so unreasonable, was anything so extravagant ever seen before in this world?" demanded Lady Acorn, spreading out her hands right and left. "I tell you there are fifty things here that I never ordered; that I never should order unless I lost my senses. See that costly silk costume, yonder—that shaded grey—why, you'd charge five-and-twenty guineas for that, if you'd charge a farthing. Don't tell me, madame."

"Plutôt thirty guineas, I believe," equably answered Madame. "It is of the richest, that silk. Miladi Frances intends it for her robe de voyage to-morrow."

"She may intend to go voyaging in gold, but be none the nearer doing it," retorted the Countess. "I never ordered that dress, and I won't take it. Do you mean to tell me you did not understand she should go off in her green silk, with new trimmings on the sleeves and skirt?"

"But Miladi Frances did come to me to say she would *not* go off in the green silk," represented Madame. "She did fix on a pattern costume, and she did choose this grey silk out of a caisse of silks just arrived from Paris. She did choose a great many more things. It is just five days ago, and I did say, 'Mais, miladi, we cannot get them all up in the time.' 'You *must* get them up,' she replied to me: and I did hurry my people, and had them at work late and early; and—*voici.*"

Madame concluded with a sweep of her neatly-gloved fingers towards the collection lying around. Lady Acorn's anger increased: it was now turned partly upon her absent daughter.

"Lady Frances would order your whole show-room, no doubt; but you must be a downright simpleton to listen to her. No, Madame Damereau, what I order I pay for, but nothing else; and you will just have all this superfluity taken back again. If ——"

"Anything the matter? is the house on fire?" called out a happy voice at this critical juncture, and Frances ran into the room with her bonnet on. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting, madame; I could not help it. And is my lady mother scolding at my extravagance?

"Extravagance! that's not the name for it," retorted the Countess. "How dare you do these wild things, Frances? Look at all this"—

sweeping her hand round the room as Madame Damereau had just swept hers—"Did you suppose I should accept them? or pay for them?"

"No, mamma, I knew you would not," laughed Frances. "I shall pay for them myself."

"Oh, indeed! Where's the money to come from?"

"Colonel Hope gave it me," said the girl, gleefully executing a pirouette. "A few days ago he put three bank notes of one hundred pounds each into my hands, saying he supposed I could spend it; and I went to Madame's at once. What a love of a costume!" cried Frances. "I am going away in it."

"A great deal better if you had gone away in your green one, and put by Colonel Hope's money for a rainy day," snapped the Countess.

Frances laughed merrily. "A wedding comes but once in a life-time, mamma. As to rainy days—Gerard and I don't mean to have any."

But the great event of this afternoon, the trying-on of the bridal dress, must be proceeded with, for Madame Damereau's time was more precious than that of ordinary mortals. The bride elect was pacing about in her splendour, peeping into this glass, gazing into that, when a message was brought to Lady Acorn that Mr. Cleveland was below. He had come up from Netherleigh to perform the marriage ceremony, and was to be the guest for a day or two of Lord and Lady Acorn.

She went down at once, leaving Frances and Madame Damereau to the finery. There were many odds and ends of Netherleigh gossip she wished to hear from the Rector. He was bending over the drawing-room fire, warming his hands.

"Are you cold?" inquired Lady Acorn.

"Rather. As one gets older, one feels the cold and fatigue of a journey more keenly," he added, smiling. "It is a regular April day: warm in the sun, cold in the wind and shade."

"He *is* getting older," thought Lady Acorn, as she looked at his face, chilled and grey, and his whitening hair; though, for a wonder, she did not tell him so. They had not met for some months; he had paid no visit to London since the previous November: and then his errand had been the same as now—to celebrate a marriage.

And, of the events of the past autumn and winter months there is not much to relate. Oscar Dalrymple was in his own place now, Knutford, Selina with a handsome income settled on her; and Robert and his wife lived at Moat Grange. They had been married from Grosvenor Square in November, Mr. Cleveland, as again now, coming up for it. In the old, old days, before Robert went wrong, and all the trouble came, the Rector of Netherleigh used to joke the two young people about the knot he should be called upon to tie. Lady Frances had been one of Mary's bridesmaids: and Mary and her husband would in turn be present at this wedding. Lady Adela was still at Netherleigh Rectory. And perhaps it was of her that the

Countess wanted chiefly to question him. She did not, however, do so at once.

"All quite well at home?" she asked.

"Tolerably so, thank you," he replied. "Mary, as you know, is ailing: and she will be for some little time to come."

"Dear me, yes," came the quick and irritable assent. "*This* baby will make the third. I can't think what you want with so many."

The Rector laughed. "Mary sent her love to you; and especially to Frances: and I was to be sure to say to Frances how sorry she was not to be able to be at her wedding. Adela also sent her love."

"Ah! And how is *she?*"

"She ——" Mr. Cleveland hesitated. "She is much the same. Pretty well in health, I think."

"I suppose Robert Dalrymple and his wife are coming up to-day?"

"They came with me. Francis Netherleigh's carriage was waiting for them at the terminus. It brought me on also."

"And that poor girl Alice? Is she any stronger?"

"She will never be stronger in this world," said the Rector, shaking his head. "But she is pretty well—for her. I think her life may be prolonged some few years yet."

"She and Gerard Hope had a love affair once; I am pretty sure of it. He liked her better than he liked Frances."

"Well, she could never have married. One so sickly as Alice ought not to become a wife; and she had, I expect, the good sense to see that. I know she is pleased at his marriage with Frances. She is most unselfish; truly good; there are not many like Alice Dalrymple. Her mother is surprisingly well," he went on, after a pause; "seems to have gone from an old woman into a young one. Robert's coming back did that for her."

"And now—what about Adela's behaviour? how is she going on?" snapped Lady Acorn, as if the very subject soured her.

"I wanted to speak to you about Adela," said Mr. Cleveland. "In one sense of the word, she is not going on satisfactorily. Though her health is pretty good I believe, her mind is anything but healthy. Mary and I often talk of it in private, and she said I had better speak to you. As I of course should ——"

"Why, it is just the case of the MacIvors over again!" interrupted Lady Acorn. "Harriet sent Sandy to talk to me about it, just in this way, last summer."

"Yes, there has not been much change since then, I fancy. I confess that I am very sorry for Adela."

"Is she like a shadow still?"

"Like little else. The fever of the mind is consuming the body. I look upon it as the most hopeless case I have ever known. Adela does the same, though from a different point of view. She is dying for her husband ——"

"To go back to him?" interrupted Lady Acorn.

"No, no; she knows that can never be. I feel sure she never glances at anything so improbable. But she is dying for his forgiveness. The word is strong, you will think," broke off Mr. Cleveland, "but it was the word she herself once used to me—*dying* for it."

"His personal forgiveness, does she mean?"

"I hardly know. She is not likely to obtain that. She would like, I take it, to live in his memory as one not utterly despicable, and she knows she must and does so live in it. She pictures his contempt for her, his scornful condemnation of the way she acted in the past; and her humiliation, coupled with remorse, has grown into a disease. Yes, it is a miserable case. They are as entirely and hopelessly separated as they could be by death."

"Ah, Cleveland! You are here, then?"

The interruption came from the Earl. He stepped forward to shake hands, and drew a chair forward.

"We were talking of Adela," said the Countess, when the few words of greeting were over. "She has not yet come to her senses."

"I was saying that her case is certainly one of the most hopeless ever known," observed Mr. Cleveland. "She is as hopelessly separated from her husband as she could be by death, while both are yet living, and have probably a long life before them."

Lord Acorn sighed. "One can't help being sorry for Adela, mistaken though she was."

Mr. Cleveland glanced at the Earl. "I am glad you came in," he said. "I wanted to speak to you as well as to Lady Acorn. Adela talks of going into a sisterhood."

"Into a *what?*" cried her ladyship; her tone one of unbounded surprise.

"She has had the idea in her mind for some time, I fancy," continued the Rector. "I heard of it first last autumn, when she startled me one day by suddenly expressing a wish that she was a Roman Catholic. I found that the wish did not proceed from any desire to change her own faith, but simply because the Roman Catholics possess places of refuge in the shape of convents. Into which a poor creature, as Adela expressed it, tired of having no longer a place in the world, might enter, and find peace."

"She'd soon wish herself out again!" cried Lady Acorn: while the Earl's generally impassive face wore a look of disturbance.

"I heard no more of this for some time," resumed Mr. Cleveland, "and dismissed it from my memory, believing it to have been but a hasty expression arising from some moment's vexation, and meaning nothing. But a week or two ago Mary spoke to me. She had discovered through Davvy that Adela was really and truly thinking of retiring into some place of refuge or other."

"Into a convent?" shrieked Lady Acorn.

"Not a convent. And not into any institution of the Roman Catholics. It seems she has been corresponding lately with some of

her former acquaintances, who might, as she thought, help her, and making inquiries of them. I noticed that letters came for her rather frequently, and I hoped she was beginning to take a little more interest in life. However, through some person or other, she has heard of an institution that she feels inclined to try. I think ——"

"What is the institution?" imperatively demanded the Countess.

"It is not, as I gather, a religious institution at all, in the sense of setting itself up for religion especially, or professing any one particular creed over other creeds," replied Mr. Cleveland. "Any earnest woman, wishing to lead a self-denying life, be she Presbyterian or Romanist, Churchwoman or Dissenter, can enter it. Adela, it seems, sought to find out some 'Protestant Convent,' as she called it; and she was not successful. So she had to give that idea up. This other place fell under her notice, I am sorry to say—for I do not think the work will suit her."

"What *is* the work?"

"But, Betsy," quietly remonstrated the Earl, "you don't give time for an explanation."

"He does not say what it is," retorted the Countess. "One would think"—turning sharply on the Rector—"you were keeping it back."

"I don't know but I am," said Mr. Cleveland, admiring her discernment. "Well, it is a nursing institution. And Adela, if she enters it, will have to attend to the sick, night or day."

"Heaven help her for a simpleton!" ejaculated her ladyship. "Why you might take every occupation known to this world, and not find one to which she is less suited. Adela could not nurse the sick, however good her will might be. She has no vocation for it."

"Just what my wife says. Some people are, so to say, born-nurses, while others, and Adela is one, could never fit themselves for it. Mary told her so only yesterday. To this, and to other remonstrance, Adela has but one answer—that the probationary training she will have to undergo will remedy her defects and inexperience."

"But the life of a sick-nurse is so exhausting a life, so wearing to the frame and spirit!" cried Lord Acorn, who had listened in dismay. "Where is this place?"

"A long way off. It is in Yorkshire. Three or four ladies, sisters, middle-aged, educated women of fortune, set up the scheme. Wishing, it is said, to satisfy their consciences by doing some useful work in the world, they pitched upon nursing, and began by going out of their home, first one and then another, whenever any poor peasant turned sick. They were, no doubt, good Christian women, sacrificing their own ease, comfort and income for the benefit of others. From that arose the Institution, as it is called now; other ladies joined it, and it is known far and wide. I have not one word to say against it: rather would I speak in its praise: but it will not do for Adela. Perhaps you can remonstrate with her."

"Have you remonstrated?" asked Lord Acorn.

"Not yet. It was only yesterday that Mary learned these particulars. Adela had said once or twice that she rather thought of turning nurse, and Mary laughed at her. Of course when Mary found yesterday how grave it was, she spoke to me. Before talking to her myself, I thought I would speak to you. But it is not settled, I believe," added Mr. Cleveland. "Adela has not finally made up her mind to go; though Mary fears she will do so."

"Let her!" cried the Countess, in her vexation. "Let my young lady go to this place and try it! She'll pretty soon come out of it again."

In truth, poor Adela was at a loss what to do with her blighted life—how to get through the weary days that had no pleasure in them. Netherleigh Rectory had brought to her no more rest than Sir Sandy's Scottish stronghold, or the bleak old château in Switzerland. She wanted to find peace, and she found it not.

Perhaps if she had exercised a little patience it might have come to her—for she was in the right way now, striving to submit herself wholly and entirely to God. She thought the fault lay in herself—that she must enter upon a more actively religious life, must take upon herself the occupation of some good work, to insure it.

No, peace did not come to her. Remorseful recollection was alone her portion, despondency her daily meed. Could she have foreseen any end to it, she might have borne it better; but there could be no end. This same solitary life of separation must go on for ever.

Some excitement crept into its daily monotony whenever Sir Francis was staying at Court Netherleigh. It was not often. She could not bear to see him, for it brought back to her all the cruel pain of having lost him; and yet, when she knew he was at Netherleigh, she was unable to rest indoors, but must go out in the hope that she should see him—see him at some safe distance; for she never ventured within view. It was as a fever. And perhaps this very fact—that she could not, when he was breathing the same atmosphere, rest without striving to see him—combined with the consciousness that she ought not to do so, rendered her more anxious to get away from Netherleigh and be employed in some wholesome daily work. Anyway, what Mr. Cleveland stated was quite true—that she, Lady Adela, was corresponding with this nursing institution in Yorkshire, with the view of entering it.

One phase of torment, which has not yet been mentioned, was getting to lie so heavily upon her mind as to be almost insupportable. It was the thought of the large income allowed her by her husband. That she, who had blighted his life, should be living yet upon his bounty, indebted to him for every luxury that remained to her, was in truth a despicable fact and hard to bear. If she could but get a living for herself, though ever so poor a one—how thankful she should be, she often told herself. And, perhaps, this trouble turned the scale, or speedily would turn it, in regard to embracing

this life of usefulness: for there would no longer be any necessity for the allowance from Sir Francis.

The wedding-day, Thursday, rose bright and glorious: just the day that should shine on all happy bridals. Frances was given away by her father, and Gerard was attended by a former fellow clerk in the Red Tape Office. Colonel Hope had settled an income upon his nephew, but Gerard was still in the house in Leadenhall Street, and likely to remain there; for the Colonel disapproved of idle young men. Gerard had taken a small pretty house at Richmond, and would travel to the City of a morning.

At the wedding breakfast-table at Lord Acorn's, Lady Grace and Sir Francis Netherleigh sat side by side. Towards its close, Grace took the opportunity of saying something to him in a low tone.

"We have been so confidential on many points for years, you and I, unhappily have had to be so," she began, "that I think I scarcely need make an apology, or ask your forgiveness, for a few words I wish to say to you now."

"Say on, Grace," was the cordial answer.

"It is about Adela." And then she briefly touched upon what her father and mother had heard from Mr. Cleveland the day before: of Adela's unhappy frame of mind and her idea of entering a nursing institution, to become one of its sisterhood.

Sir Francis heard her to the end in silence. But he heard apparently without interest: and somehow Grace's anxious spirit felt thrown back upon itself.

"It has troubled us all to hear this, my father especially," she said. "It would be so laborious a life, so very unfit for Adela."

"I can readily understand that you would not altogether like it," he replied. "If money could be of any use ——"

"Oh no, no," interrupted Grace, her face flushing. "The allowance you have made from the first has been so wonderfully liberal. I don't know why I mentioned the subject to you—except that we think it is entirely unsuited to Adela."

"Lord and Lady Acorn must be the best judges of that," was the very indifferent answer.

"Her mind is in the most unhappy state conceivable; as it has been all along. For one thing," added Grace, her voice sinking to a yet lower key, "I think she is pining for your forgiveness."

"That is not at all likely, I fancy," coldly returned Sir Francis. And as he evinced no inclination to continue the subject, but rather the contrary, Grace said no more.

She could not have told herself why she introduced it. Had it been with any hope, consciously or unconsciously, of being of service to Adela, it had signally failed. Evidently his wife and her concerns were topics that bore no longer any interest for Francis Netherleigh.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN MISS MARGERY'S PARLOUR.

"Oh, Robert, what a lovely day!"

Standing at the open window of her own pretty sitting-room, a room that had been built and decorated for her during the late alterations to Moat Grange, was Mary Dalrymple. Robert, heated and flushed, had come in at the gate, and caught the words across the lawn. He had been out since early morning, superintending various matters: for to-day was a grand fête day at Moat Grange, and no end of preparations were being made for it.

Robert called it a house-warming. He had talked of it, as a thing to come, ever since his marvellous return; but he had waited for the alterations to be completed that were to make the gloomy old house into a new one, and for the warm summer weather to set in. For this was to be an open-air entertainment, for the gratification of the poor as well as the rich.

Improvements had gone on without doors as well as within. Those cottage-huts by the old mill had been rebuilt, and their humble tenants were reinstated. Gratitude and content had taken the place of murmuring, and the once angry men thought they could never do enough for their young Squire, Robert Dalrymple.

"What a lovely day!" repeated Mary.

It was the first day of June, and one of the sweetest days that charming month ever put forth. Promising to be a little too warm, perhaps, but inexpressibly bright and beautiful. Save for a light fleecy cloud here and there, the sky was of a deep blue; the sun flickered through the leaves of the trees, wearing yet somewhat of their tender green, and caught Robert's head as he stood, looking up to his wife.

"Ay, it is," said Robert in reply to her remark, "very lovely. It will be very hot, though; it is so already."

She leaned from the window in her cool white morning gown, smiling at her husband. How good-looking they both were—and how happy! Every now and then, even yet, Mary could scarcely realize the change—the intense happiness which had succeeded to the years of what had appeared irredeemable sorrow.

"And now, Robert, I should think you must want breakfast—if you have not had it."

"But I have had it. I ran in to my mother's and took some with her and Alice. The tents are all up, Mary, and the people are getting into their Sunday's best."

"So soon! Don't forget, if you please, sir, that we sit down to lunch to-day at one o'clock precisely. We can't do without you then, you know, though we did at breakfast."

Robert drew a little nearer to the window. "Where are they all?" he asked.

"Gone out for a stroll. I told them I had a famished husband coming in and must wait at home for him. I think Gerard and his wife have only gone to your mother's. I don't know about Oscar and Selina. Perhaps she has gone to see the new baby at the Rectory."

"Selina does not care for babies."

"But she does for gossip. And Lady Mary is well enough for that."

"What is that letter you are keeping in your hand?"

Her face changed to sadness. "It contains bad news, Robert: and though I have been chattering to you so gaily and lightly, it is lying on my heart. Francis cannot come."

"No!"

"This letter came from him just after you went out. Some dreadful measure—important, *he* calls it—has to be debated upon in committee this afternoon, and Francis has to stay for it."

"Well, I am disappointed," cried Robert.

"As we all are. Robert, I do think it is too bad. I do think Francis might have spared this one day to us," added Mary with a sigh. "He seems to regard politics as quite a recreation."

"Don't be hard on him, Mary. He has not much else now in the way of recreation."

Gerard Hope and Lady Frances had come to the Grange for the fête: Gerard had coaxed a three days' holiday out of Mr. Howard, with whom he was a favourite, though the old gentleman had grumblingly reminded him that his honeymoon was not long over. Oscar Dalrymple and Selina had also arrived the previous night from their own place, Knutford. Perhaps in his heart Oscar had not been sorry to give up the Grange and its troubles. At any rate, he made no sign of regret. Peace and plenty had supervened on discomfort, and he and Selina were friends with all.

Mary had guessed rightly—that Selina had gone to the Rectory. If not to see the new baby, to see the baby's mother. The baby was more than two weeks old, and Lady Mary was seated on a sofa, doing some useful work.

"It is early days for that, is it not?" cried Selina, as she went in.

"Not at all," laughed Lady Mary. "With my many little ones, I have to be always at work. And I am thankful to be well enough for it. You reached the Grange yesterday?"

"Yes—and found all well. Mamma came up to dinner last night. She is quite young and active. Gerard and Frances are gone to see Alice—who is much better—and then Frances is coming here to see you."

"Where is your husband?"

"Oscar! He went across the fields to the Mead House to see old Bridport. What a pity you cannot come out to-day, Mary!—

And who else do you think can't come out! At least, not out *here*."

"Who is that?"

"Francis Netherleigh. Mary Dalrymple heard from him this morning. He is kept in London by some business connected with the House. He would have been the star of the fête. Yes, don't laugh at me—he *would*—and we are all vexed. I'd not be in that House of Commons for the world," resentfully concluded Selina. "I do think he might have stretched a point, and got off to-day!"

"Y-es—if he wished to come," was the doubting assent. "The question is—did he wish it?"

"What do you mean?" asked Selina.

Lady Mary Cleveland let fall her needle and looked full at Mrs. Oscar Dalrymple. "It has struck me that he has not cared to come here, you know. Instead of taking up his abode at Court Netherleigh, he pays but a flying visit to it now and then. My husband and I both think that he does not choose to subject himself to the chance of meeting Adela."

"I should not wonder. They were talking about Adela at the Grange last night," resumed Selina, in an accent of hesitation—"saying something about her joining a sisterhood of nurses. But I'm sure *that* can't be true."

"It is quite true, Selina."

Selina opened her amazed eyes. "True! Why, she would have to put her hair under a huge cap, and wear cotton gowns and white aprons!"

Lady Mary smiled. *That* part of the programme would assuredly have kept Selina from entering on anything of the sort. "Yes, it is true," repeated Mary. "The negotiations have been pending for some time; but it is decided at last, and Adela departs for Yorkshire on Saturday, to shut herself into the institution."

"And will she never come out again?"

Lady Mary shook her head. "We cannot foresee the future, Selina. All we know is, that Adela is most unfitted for the kind of work, and we shall be surprised if she does not break down under it. Her frame is slight and delicate, her instincts are sensitive and refined. Fancy Adela dressing broken heads, or sitting up for a week with a family of children ill with fever!"

Selina put her hands before her eyes. "Oh!" she cried out in horror. "But she surely won't have to do all that?"

"She will. She must take any case she is appointed to."

"Why, I would rather go out ironing! Surely she will not do this!"

"Indeed she will: and she intends that it shall be for life. Her father came down here to remonstrate with her: he has always had more influence over her than anyone else: but it availed nothing.

They were together for an hour in the red parlour—Adela's sitting-room here—and I could see how distressing to her the interview had been. Her eyes were swollen with crying."

"Well, I can't understand it," concluded Selina, rising. "Had it been a question of necessity, there might be reason in her wanting to do something and to make a guy of herself, but it is not so. Those big linen caps are dreadful."

The door of the red parlour was open as Selina gained the hall. Adela sat there sewing: and Selina went in. How fragile and dainty and delicate she looked, this still young and lovely woman, in her simple muslin dress, with the ribbon at her throat and the lace at her wrists. Selina sat down. "At work to-day, Adela!"

"I am making some frocks for that poor Widow Jeffrey's children. But for Mr. Cleveland I don't know what they would do, now their father is gone."

"But all Netherleigh is en fête to-day! So ought you to be."

Adela raised her sad and beautiful eyes to Selina's in some surprise. "The fête can have nothing to do with me, Selina. I am very glad it is so fine for it: and I hope everybody will enjoy it, yourself included."

"Thank you: I'm sure I shall. Adela, what is this we hear about you?" broke forth Selina, unable to keep silence longer. "You are going to shut yourself up in a grim building, and wear a most disfiguring costume, and nurse cases of fever!"

"Yes," sighed Adela. "I leave for it the day after to-morrow."

Selina paused. "Have you sat down and *counted the cost?*"

"Over and over again. It will be less painful than what I have long been enduring: bodily discomfort is more tolerable to bear than mental remorse. I shall live a useful life, at any rate, Selina. For a long while now it has been worse than a wasted one."

"They think—Mary does, at least—that you will not be strong enough to stand the fatigue."

"I must do my best," sighed Adela. "I hope the strength—in all ways—will come with its need."

"I daresay they give nothing but suet dumplings for dinner four day out of the seven!"

Adela faintly smiled. "I don't expect to find luxuries, Selina."

"Do you take Davvy?"

"Take Davvy!" echoed Lady Adela. "No, indeed. I shall be, so to say, a servant myself."

Selina, in very dismay, gave her hands a slight wring. Adela might as well put herself at once out of the world. "I must be going," she said. "You are sure you will not come to the fête, Adela?"

"I have done with fêtes for ever," replied Adela, as she drew down Selina's face for a farewell kiss. "Perhaps you will write to me sometimes?" And Selina Dalrymple, sick and sorry for the blighted life, went out with her eyes full of tears.

The day wore on to the afternoon and the business of the fête began. Old and young, gentle and simple, the aristocracy of the surrounding neighbourhood and the tenant-farmers and the labourers congregated on the lawns, in the gardens, and in the home field, where the tents were placed. Of the attendants, Reuben was chief, his fresh face happy again as of yore.

Amidst other entertainments, there was a fancy-fair, the proceeds of it to be distributed to the poor; though indeed it was more for fun than gain, fortune-telling, post-offices, and mock auctions prevailing. Alice Dalrymple had a corner in this tent for her reclining chair, and watched with pleasure the busy scene. Lady Frances Hope stood by her; her husband was flitting from stall to stall. Robert's coming back had worked wonders for Alice.

"There!" said Gerard, coming up to her, his face gay as usual, as he handed a charming bouquet to Alice, "a fine squabble I have had to get you this. Half a crown those keepers of the flower-stall wanted, if you'll believe me! I gave them eighteenpence and told them they were harpies."

"You should not have bought it for me," smiled Alice, gratefully inhaling the scent of the flowers. "You are just what you always were, Gerard—thinking of everybody else, never of self."

"Why should I think of self?" returned Gerard, his wife having left them for a distant stall. "But you know you always liked to lecture me, Alice."

"For your good," she answered, raising her eyes to his.

"Was it for my good? Ah, Alice," he added, his tone changing to one of regret, "if you had but taken me into your own hands, as you might have done—as I prayed you to do—you would have made a Solomon of me for wisdom ——"

"Hush, Gerard! Best as it is," she whispered, gently laying her hand upon his. "I was not fit—in any way. As it is, I have you both to love, and I am supremely happy. And I think you are."

"Ah well," quaintly conceded Gerard, "one is warned not to expect perfect bliss in this sublunary world, so one can only make the best of what fate and fortune bestow upon us. Would you not like to walk round and look at the stalls, Alice? You can go comfortably, I think, on my arm."

"Thank you, yes, I should like it—if you will take me."

Amidst the very few people of degree not at the fête was Lady Adela. Mr. Cleveland had asked her, when setting out himself, whether she would not go with him just to have a peep at it, but she said she preferred to sit with Mary. She had heard the news spoken openly by the Rector at the luncheon-table, that Sir Francis Netherleigh was not coming to it. And in Lady Mary's room she sat, pursuing her work.

But, as the afternoon advanced, Adela grew weary and restless, needing a little fresh air. She put her garden hat on and went out:

not intending to go near the gaiety, but rather to keep away from it. And little fear was there of her encountering any stragglers, for the feasting was just beginning, and no Englishman voluntarily walks away from that.

These later hours of the day were warm and beautiful as the earlier ones had been. Adela walked gently along, until she came to Court Netherleigh. A sudden impulse prompted her to enter the grounds. She had never yet done so during these months of sojourn, had always driven back the almost irrepressible yearning. Surely there would be no harm in entering now: she did so want to see the place once more before quitting Netherleigh and civilized life for ever. Nobody would see her. She was perfectly secure from interruption from Sir Francis—and from all other people besides, the world and his wife having gone a-gadding.

Not by the lodge gates and the avenue did she enter; but by a little gate, higher up the road, that she had gone in and out of so often in the time of Aunt Margery. Drawing near to the house, she sat down under a side clump of trees in view of the favourite apartment that used to be called Miss Margery's parlour, the glass doors of which were standing open. Cool and gentle she looked as she sat there; she wore the same simple muslin gown that she had worn in the morning. Loosening the strings of her straw hat, she pushed it somewhat back from her delicate face, and sat on, thinking of the past.

Of the past generally and of her own particular part in it—when was it absent from her memory? Of the means of happiness that had been bestowed upon her in a degree Heaven seldom vouchsafes to mortal woman, and of her terrible ingratitude. How different all would have been now, had she but been what she might have been!

Not only had she wrecked her own life, but also her husband's. The bitter requital she had dealt out to him day after day and year after year in return for all the loving care he lavished on her, was very present to her now. For a long while past she had pined for his forgiveness—just to hear him speak it; she coveted it more than ever now when she was about to put all chance of hearing it beyond possibility. God's pardon she hoped she was obtaining, for she prayed for it night and day—but she yearned for his also.

It was close upon two years since he put her away from him and from her home. It would be two years next Christmas since Miss Margery died. All that while to have been feeding the bitter grief that played upon her heartstrings!—to have been doing perpetual battle with her remorse!

Lost in these regrets, Adela sat on, taking no heed of the time, when a movement caught her eye. Some one, who appeared to have come in by the same little gate, was striding towards the house. With a faint exclamation of dismay, Adela drew back to hide herself amidst the trees. For it was her husband.

Of all the world that could intrude, she had deemed herself most

secure from *him:* knowing that he was detained in London and could not be down. How was it, ran her tumultuous thoughts. She supposed—what was indeed the truth—that he had at the last found himself able to come.

Yes, but only for an hour or two. She did not know that he had got down at mid-day, had been to the fête, and was now on his way back to catch a train for London, calling at home on his road. He made straight for the open doors of Miss Margery's parlour, and went in.

A strange impulse seized upon Adela. What if she dared to speak to him now?—to sue for the forgiveness for which her heart seemed breaking? He could not kill her for it: and—perhaps—he might speak it—and she should carry along with her to her isolation that much of peace.

Without pausing to weigh the words she should speak, or the consequences of her act, she glided after him into the room. Sir Francis stood at a table, his back to the window, apparently taking some papers out of his pocket-book. The sudden darkening of the light, for she made no noise, must have caused him to turn: and there they stood, face to face, gazing, if they so minded, at the ravages time had made in the other. She was the more changed. Her once brilliant eyes were sad and gentle, her cheeks bore the hectic of emotion, all the haughtiness had gone out of her sweet face for ever. And he? He was noble as always, but his hair had grey threads in it, and his forehead was lined.

"May I be allowed to speak to you for a moment?" she panted, breaking the silence, yet hardly able to articulate. "I—I—" and then she broke down from sheer inability to draw breath.

He stood quite still by the table, as if waiting, his tall form drawn to its full height, his face and bearing perfectly calm. But he made no answer.

"I beg your pardon," she humbly began again, having halted just inside the window. "I would not have followed you in, or spoken to you, but that it is the last opportunity we shall have of meeting on earth. I go away the day after to-morrow to seclude myself from the world; and I—I cannot go without your forgiveness. When I saw you come in—not knowing even that you were at Netherleigh—an impulse I could not resist, brought me after you to ask you to forgive me. Just to ask it!"

But still Sir Francis did not answer. Poor Adela went on in her weak and imploring tone.

"It has seemed to me that if I went away for good without your forgiveness, I should almost die as the days went on—knowing that I could never ask it then. If you could believe how truly, how bitterly I have repented, perhaps you would not in pity withhold it from me. Will you not give it me? Will you not hear me?" she added, lifting her trembling hands, as he yet made no sign. "God forgives: wil not you forgive?"

Advancing, she sank on her knees before him, close to him as he stood, her sad face lifted to his in piteous yearning. He drew a step back: he had listened in impassive silence; but he spoke now.

"Rise, rise, Lady Adela. Do not kneel to me."

She bent forward; she laid her poor weak hands upon him; the scalding tears began to stream down her face, so pitiful in its sad entreaty. Sir Francis gently touched her hands with his, essaying to raise her; a cold, distant touch, evidently not of goodwill.

"Lady Adela, I will not say another word, or allow you to say one until you rise. You must be aware that you are only vexing me."

She rose to her feet obediently. She stood still, apart from him. He drew back yet, and stood still also, his arms folded.

"Tell me what it is you wish. I scarcely understand."

"Only your forgiveness, your pardon of the past. It will be a comfort to carry it with me where I am going."

"Where is it that you are going?"

"I am going to join some ladies in Yorkshire, who pass their time nursing the poor and sick," she answered. "It is called a Sisterhood. I have been thinking that perhaps in that retirement, and in the occupation it will entail, I may find peace. Once entered, I feel sure I shall never have the courage to leave it: therefore I know that we shall not meet again."

He did not speak.

"And I should like to thank you, if I may dare, for all your consideration, your generous loving-kindness. Believe me that, in the midst of the humiliation of accepting it, I have been grateful. When once I have entered this refuge, the necessity for your bounty will cease. Thank you deeply for all."

"You are tired of the world?"

"Yes. It has been to me too full of shame and misery."

"Do you know that you brought a great deal of misery upon *me?*"

"Oh, it is the consciousness of *that* that is killing me. If I could undo it with my life, I would; and be thankful. I want your forgiveness, Sir Francis, for all the past, for all my shameful, hard wickedness. The recollection of it, the cruel remorse ever haunting my conscience, has well-nigh killed me. I want you to say that you will try to be happy in your life; there will be less impediment perhaps, now that I shall be far away: I shall be to you as one dead. If I could but know that you were happy! that I have not quite blighted your life, as I have my own!"

"Do you like the idea of entering this retreat?"

"As well as I could like anything that can be open to me in this world now. It will be a refuge; and I do dare to hope—I have dared to *pray*—that I may in time gain peace."

"Could the past come over again you would, then, be a different wife to me?"

"Don't reproach me," she sobbed. "None can know how cruel

my fate is, how bitter my repentance. Won't you be merciful?—won't you say that you forgive me before I go away for ever?"

"Yes, Adela, I will say it," he answered then. "I forgive you from my heart. I will say more. If you do wish to atone for the past, to be my true and loving wife, these arms are open to you."

He opened them as he spoke. She staggered back, unable to comprehend; unable to believe. He did not move; simply stood still where he was, his extended arms inviting her.

"Do not mock me, pray," she feebly wailed. "Do not be cruel: you never were that. I have told you how bitterly I repent—that my remorse is greater than I can bear. If my life could undo the past, could atone to you in the least degree, I would gladly lay it down."

"Adela, I am not mocking you. You cannot surely think it, knowing me as you do know. You may come back to me if you will, and be once more my dear wife. My arms are waiting for you; my heart is waiting for you: it shall be as you will."

Panting, breathless, the hectic coming and going on her wasted cheeks, she slowly, doubtfully advanced; and when close to him she fell down at his feet.

His own breath was shortening, his chest heaving, emotion nearly overcame him. Raising her up, he enfolded her to his loving heart.

For a little while, as she lay in his arms, their tears mingled together; ay, even his were falling. A moment of agitation, such as this, does not often visit a man during his lifetime.

"There must be no mistake in future, Adela? You will be to me a loving wife?"

Once more, in deep humiliation she bent before him. "Your loving and faithful wife for ever and for ever."

Quietly enough they walked, side by side, through the park. Who, watching them, could have suspected the agitation just lived through, the momentous change that had taken place in their lives? Sir Francis turned on his way to the railway station, for he had to go back to London; Adela returned to the Rectory.

On the following morning Mr. Cleveland took Adela to Chenevix House. Sir Francis had been there to prepare the way for her. It was good news, great news for the Earl and Countess; but it had not much diminished my lady's tartness. She had been too angry with Adela to come round at once.

"Do you know where you are going this evening, Adela?" Grace asked her in a whisper, a happy light in her eyes.

"No. Where?"

"Francis Netherleigh has some mission that is taking him to Paris—my belief is, he has improvised it. He starts to-night, and he will take you with him—if you are very good."

"How kind he is!" murmured Adela.

"Have a care how you behave in future, Adela," said her father in solemn admonition that evening; as Sir Francis stood ready to take her out to his carriage, which waited to convey them to the railway station.

"I will, papa: Heaven helping me. Good-bye, dear mamma."

"Oh, good-bye, and a pleasant journey to you! It's more than you deserve," retorted my lady.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CONCLUSION.

THERE is little more to relate.

On just such a lovely June day as the one described above, and twelve months later, another fête took place. But this time it was at Court Netherleigh. Not an open air fête, this, or one on a large scale: only a few chosen friends had been invited to it.

In the morning, in Netherleigh church and at the hands of the good Rector, the infant heir of Court Netherleigh had been made one of Christ's fold.

Court Netherleigh was the chief home of Sir Francis and his wife. Grosvenor Square was but visited occasionally. Adela's tastes had totally changed: fashion and frivolity no longer held chief place in her heart: higher aims and duties had superseded them. Lady Mary Cleveland herself was not so actively anxious for the welfare of the poor and distressed as was Adela Netherleigh.

> "Sweet are the uses of adversity,
> Which like a toad, ugly and venomous,
> Wears yet a precious jewel in its head."

As she stood this morning at the baptismal font, her child in the arms of Mr. Cleveland, tears of joy silently trickled down her face. Hardly a day or a night of this latter twelvemonth, but they had risen in gratitude, contrasting what had been with what was.

Lord and Lady Acorn were present; Grace, who was godmother, had handed the baby to the clergyman. Mr. Howard had come down with Colonel and Lady Sarah Hope; Robert Dalrymple and Mary were there from Moat Grange, and the Rector's wife.

While walking back to Court Netherleigh after the ceremony, the party was joined by another guest—Sir Turtle Kite.

Sir Turtle's presence was incidental. Deeply sensible of the service he once rendered them—for, had the little alderman chosen to be crusty then, where would Charles Cleveland have been, where Lady Adela?—the Acorn family had not dropped him with the passing moment. Neither had Sir Francis Netherleigh. On this particular day—it being a very splendid one in London—the Knight chanced to think he should like to air himself in the sunbeams, and

take a holiday. Remembering the standing invitation to Court Netherleigh, and knowing that Sir Francis was staying there and not in Grosvenor Square, Sir Turtle travelled down, and met the party as they were going home from church.

"Dear me! I am very sorry," he cried, taken aback. "I had no idea—I had better go home again."

"Not a bit of it," said Sir Francis heartily, as he clasped his hand. "You are all the more welcome. I am sure you will like to join us in good wishes to my little boy. Adela will show him to you."

So Sir Turtle's beaming face made one at the luncheon-table, none so delighted as he. And he surreptitiously scribbled a note in his pocket-book to purchase the handsomest presentation christening-cup that could be found for money.

Luncheon over, they went out of doors, into the charming sunshine, strolling hither and thither, taking refuge on the shaded benches beneath the trees. Adela gained possession of her baby in the nursery, and carried him out to show him to Sir Turtle. He was a fine little fellow of six weeks old, promising to be as noble looking as his father, and certainly possessing his beautiful grey-blue eyes.

"What is its name?" asked Sir Turtle, venturing to pat the soft little cheek with his forefinger, and rather at a loss what to say, for he did not understand as much about babies as he did of tallow.

"Francis," answered Adela. "Francis Upton. I would not have had any name but Francis for the world, and my husband thought he would like to add Upton, in remembrance of Miss Upton who used to live here."

"Francis is a very nice name; better than mine," observed Sir Turtle, sitting down by Adela. "And who are its godfathers?" he resumed, still at sea as to the proper things to be said of a baby

"My father and Mr. Howard. Sir Francis fixed upon papa, and I upon Mr. Howard. Formerly I used not to like Mr. Howard," ingenuously added Lady Adela, "but I have learnt his worth."

"Ay, a worthy man, my lady; first-rate in business. Talking of business," broke off the little alderman, glad no doubt to leave the subject of the baby, but none the less inopportunely, "do you chance to know what has become of a young fellow who got into some trouble at Grubb and Howard's—the Rector's son, yonder"—nodding towards Mr. Cleveland—"Charles, I think his name was. I have often wished to ask about him."

Lady Adela bent over her child, apparently to do something to its cap: her face had flushed blood-red.

"Charles Cleveland is in India," she said. "He is doing well; very well. My husband was—was very kind to him, and pushes him forward. He is kind to everyone."

Rising swiftly from the garden bench, she gave the baby to the nurse and went into the house. Her mother turned round from the drawing-room window.

"What have you been doing to flush your face so, Adela?" called out my lady—for it was glowing still.

"Oh, nothing: the sun perhaps," answered Adela, carelessly. "Sir Turtle Kite was looking at baby, and asking me what his name was. I told him his father's—Francis."

"Ah," said Lady Acorn, with her irrepressible propensity for bringing up disagreeable reminiscences, "I remember the time when you would not have your child's name Francis, *because* it was your husband's."

"Oh mamma, don't! That was in the mistaken years of long ago."

"And I hope you were civil to Sir Turtle," continued my lady: "you seemed to leave him very abruptly. He is a funny little round-headed man and nothing but an alderman, but he means well. Think what *your* fate might have been now, but for his—his clemency."

"If you would *please* not recal these things, mother!" besought Adela, meekly, the tears starting to her eyes. "Especially to-day, when we are all so happy."

Somehow the past, with all its dreadful mistakes and the misery they had entailed, came rushing upon her mind so vividly that she could not control her emotion. Passing into the next room and not perceiving her husband, her sobs broke forth. He came forward.

"My love, what is it?"

"Only ——"

"Nay, tell me."

"Something that mamma said made me think of that cruel time when—when I was so wicked. Francis, the shame and sin seemed all to come back again."

He held her before him; his voice one of tender reproof. "But the shame and sin never can come back, Adela. My wife, you know it."

She repressed the sobs, glancing at him with a smile through her wet eyelashes.

"I know how good you are. And I know how merciful to me God has been."

"Very merciful: very merciful to me and to you," whispered Francis Netherleigh. "Do you know, my darling, that, through all that dark time, I never lost my trust in Him."

THE END.

A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

By T. W. Speight, Author of "In the Dead of Night," etc.

I.

I WAS only a junior telegraph clerk at the time, and it seemed to me that I was about to take an important step in life, when notice came from headquarters that I, Philip East, was to be transferred from Easby to Welby Junction, with an addition of twenty-five pounds a year to my previous salary. And, indeed, my unexpected promotion seemed something to be jubilant about, for I was in love with pretty Lucy Graham, the daughter of the station-master at Easby, and now our marriage seemed by no means so hazy a dream of the future as we had hitherto been compelled to regard it. But life affords us few advantages without some corresponding drawback, and it was not pleasant to think that Lucy and I would now be parted by fifty long miles—we who had never failed to see each other at least once a day since love first whispered his secret in our ears. Still, that was one of the inevitable features of the case, and we were bound to accept it with such philosophy as we could summon to our aid.

Easby, notwithstanding that one duke and two earls live no great distance away, is little more than a good-sized village; while Welby, with its thirty thousand inhabitants and its numerous tall chimneys, prides itself upon being a rising centre of manufacturing industry. A fresh line of railway communication with it had recently been opened up, and its station rebuilt.

At the time of which I write a large proportion of the telegraph service of the country was in the hands of the different railway companies. Welby telegraph office was at the railway station, where all such messages were received and despatched as affected the working of the line, as well as those of private individuals: the two branches of the service had not then been divided as they have been since.

My coadjutor in the Welby office was named Marlow. He was considerably older than myself, and was, in fact, my senior officer. He was a quiet, bookish man, very fond of botanizing in his leisure hours: he and I never had a wrong word during the whole time we worked together. Our periods of duty were divided into two "spells" of nine hours each. The office was closed from midnight till six A.M., and we took a week of early and of late duty alternately.

The chairman of the railway company was Sir Felix Drum, of Tenfield House, three and a half miles from Welby. My cousin, Ralph Merilon, was tutor to the two sons of Sir Felix, and it was through his influence that the baronet gave me my appointment. Sir Felix, who

was said never to forget a face, did not fail to favour me with a nod and a smile whenever he encountered me by chance on the platform. After I got settled at Welby, I often walked over the fields to Tenfield House for a few hours' pleasant chat with Merilon.

Lucy and I were not long in finding out that we were by no means so completely separated from each other as at one time we had feared we should be. Lucy was the first to make the discovery.

As I was sitting in the office one evening between nine and ten o'clock, with nothing more important to do than smoke my pipe and read my book, the bell of the instrument gave the signal that I was wanted. I put down my book, rose with a yawn, and then saw that Easby station was signalling me. I gave the requisite "All right" return signal, and then waited with my eye on the instrument to note down the message. As I spelt it off letter by letter and word by word I could scarcely believe the evidence of my eyes.

"Telegraph clerk Philip East to receive a month's notice for general incompetence and persistent smoking while on duty. Oh, tell me sweet, and tell me true, if you love me as I love you."

The message ended with a loud and long ringing of the bell.

For a moment or two I was utterly bewildered. What madman could have obtained access to the instrument at Easby? A minute later a sudden light struck me, and I laughed aloud at my stupidity. Seizing the handle of the instrument, I gave the return signal to Easby, and then flashed the following reply:

"Wherever I be, on land or sea, my heart still fondly turns to thee." With lightening speed came the following answer:

"Excellent as a sentiment, but indifferent as poetry. You darling old stupid, how are you?"

It was even so. Miss Lucy had purloined the key of the telegraph office from her father's room after the clerk had left for the night. Easby being a place of very minor importance, the office was closed at nine o'clock. It was I who had taught Lucy the use of the instrument in those sweet courting days at the little country station, and she had now put her knowledge to a use such as neither of us had ever dreamt of at the time.

"A sweet girl-graduate with golden hair."

After that night Lucy and I did not fail to avail ourselves sometimes of this mode of communication. She knew the hours when I was on duty, and also the times when there was the least likelihood of our being interrupted by business messages. It seemed impossible to believe that we were separated by a space of fifty miles when brought into this close communion with each other. The very glow of our words, as they came warm and fresh from the heart, seemed borne to us by the swift slave who did our bidding. We almost felt as though we had but to put forth our lips and they must of a surety touch each other. Happy days!

But it is now time to introduce you to Mr. Wix.

How I came to know Mr. Wix, at first merely by name but afterwards personally, was by reason of his having so many telegrams addressed to him from different parts of the country, all of which, as a matter of course, passed either through my hands or those of Marlow, my fellow clerk. Although telegrams in cipher, or so composed that they conveyed an altogether different meaning to the recipient of them from that which they would have for an ordinary reader, were by no means uncommon, even at Welby, where people, who dabbled more or less in scrip and shares, were in the habit of receiving messages which only they themselves could make head or tail of, yet the singularity of the affair as regarded Mr. Wix was that the whole of the telegrams received by him bore something of this mysterious character, so that at length I grew to be far more curious as to what they could possibly be about than I was with regard to any other messages which passed through my hands.

Abel Wix was a tall, thin, wiry-looking man, between forty and fifty, with short-cut iron-grey hair and long whiskers. He dressed well and quietly, but with an indescribable something about him which seemed to suggest that he might possibly be as well acquainted with horses as he was with men. Marlow told me he had come as a stranger to Welby some three or four months before my arrival there, and had taken for a term a small furnished cottage, with its garden and coach-house, in the outskirts of the town. He had an old woman for housekeeper, with a girl to help her, and a sharp lad to look after his pony and trap, and seemed to be an independent man. When the mornings were favourable he went fishing, or otherwise smoked away the early hours of the day in his summer-house. In the afternoons he drove out along the country roads, or as far as one of the smaller towns, which lay within a radius of a dozen miles. His evenings were generally spent in the parlour of "The Black Bull," where a select coterie of the chief tradesmen of the town would meet to smoke. Mr. Wix, civil and silent, became popular; the assembly liked him. Why he had come to Welby in the first instance, where he had come from, and how long he intended to stay, no one liked to ask, and he was not the kind of man to volunteer the information.

I don't know whether a young man's not unnatural curiosity with regard to Mr. Wix's many peculiar telegrams should have been deemed an impertinence or not; but Mr. Marlow, who was himself one of the most incurious of mortals, certainly snubbed me one day when I ventured to give expression to it. "The duty of a telegraph official," said my Mentor, "is to receive and despatch with all possible celerity and accuracy whatever messages may be confided to his hands by his employers or the public, but there is certainly nothing in his instructions to warrant him in hazarding idle guesses as to what their contents may or may not possibly mean." I knew

that Marlow was in the right, and that I was in the wrong, but scarcely spoke to him for a couple of days afterwards.

I made the acquaintance of Mr. Wix in this wise. One afternoon, as I was about to go off duty, a message came for him. Both our office boys were out of the way at the time, and as it chanced that I had a little errand of my own to do in a part of the town close to Holly Cottage, it seemed to me that the best thing I could do was to deliver it myself.

I found Mr. Wix in his garden with a long clay pipe in his mouth, calmly contemplating the ripening of his pears. He favoured me with a quick suspicious glance as I put the envelope into his hands. "You are not the usual messenger?" he said, interrogatively.

I explained to him how it happened that I was the bearer of the telegram. "I see," he answered, with a nod and a smile as he tore open the envelope; "and I am obliged to you for your thoughtfulness in the matter. Sometimes it happens that half an hour's delay may make all the difference in the world." He glanced over the telegram, and then stuffed it into his pocket with an air of indifference. "But come inside," he added. "The afternoon is warm, and a glass of sherry will do you no harm."

I tried to excuse myself, but Mr. Wix would not hear of it. "I was longing for somebody to look me up," he said. "It's too hot to do aught but talk and smoke these long autumn afternoons."

We seated ourselves in the shade of the summer-house. A servant brought a decanter, some bottles of seltzer, and glasses. Mr. Wix handed me his case, and I chose a cigar.

"I daresay, now," began my host with a dry smile, after he had filled both our tumblers, "that there are very few people in Welby who receive more telegrams than I do?"

"Well, no, sir; you seem to have the lion's share of them."

"Many of them must seem strange documents to you. I daresay, now, you often wonder what they can possibly be about?"

I called to mind Marlow's words. "The duty of a telegraph official," I answered, "is simply to receive and despatch whatever messages may be confided to him, but it is no part of his business to trouble himself with idle guesses as to what they may or may not mean."

"A most praiseworthy sentiment. I drink to your health, young sir. Don't spare the sherry." Then assuming a confidential air, and laying the bowl of his pipe lightly on my sleeve: "You see," said he, "when a man who has plenty of spare time on his hands, and a little money to invest in his hobby, and that hobby happens to be the Turf, he naturally, in the course of time, gets to know a lot of people who are in the same swim as himself; and as some of these people profess to be able to give one the correct tip —from secret information, you know—about every race that is

coming off, it follows that a good many telegrams keep flying about which it would never do to let outsiders get wind of. Ah, the Turf is a fine game of speculation !"

So this was the secret of the many strange telegrams ! How simple the explanation seemed, now that I knew it !

Either Mr. Wix's cigars or Mr. Wix's sherry must have been more potent than anything of the kind I had previously been accustomed to, for before long I became very chatty and confidential indeed, while at the same time I felt my eyes begin to brighten and my cheeks begin to glow in a way that was certainly novel, but not altogether disagreeable. Mr. Wix let me have nearly all the conversation to myself. It was nearly all about telegraphy or matters connected therewith, and the questions asked by Mr. Wix, and answered by me to the best of my ability, showed him to be a man of a very inquiring turn of mind.

At length the conviction flashed across me that I was making a simpleton of myself. What had I not said, what secrets had I not divulged to this man who, two hours previously, was a stranger to me ? I arose with a sense of shame.

"What ! going already ?" said Mr. Wix, as he put down his pipe to shake hands. "Well, well, perhaps another time. Ah, were I able to read the secrets of the wires for one short week, I would engage to build up a fortune that should soon rival that of the Rothschilds !" He smiled his dry, peculiar smile, and as I walked away I felt that Mr. Abel Wix had been quietly turning me inside out for his own amusement. I took care not to call upon Mr. Wix again : whenever he and I encountered each other in the street, a nod, a smile, and a simple "Good day," were all that passed between us.

Christmas was close at hand, when, one afternoon while I was busy at the instrument, Mr. Chubb, the Welby superintendent of police, strolled into the office, as he had a habit of doing at odd times : he was a smart, dapper little man of middle age.

The Superintendent nodded to me, drew a chair to the fire, and sat down to warm his hands. He did not care to interrupt me while I was taking down a message. "By Jove ! another funny telegram for Mr. Wix," exclaimed I, as I jumped off my stool.

"Eh, what's that ?" asked Mr. Chubb, quickly, as he turned and faced me. "Pray what do you know about Mr. Wix ?"

"Oh, not much, except that we have more curious messages for him than for anyone else in Welby. When a gentleman is connected with the Turf, he naturally does get queer messages."

"And pray who told you, that Wix is connected with the Turf ?"

"He told me so himself." And I related to him all about my afternoon at Holly Cottage. He listened attentively. "Now what do you think, sir ?" I asked.

"What I think is, that Mr. Wix was throwing dust in your eyes, and laughing at you in his sleeve at the same time."

"Do you doubt his statement that he has to do with the Turf?"

"He may have, he may have. But what about this telegram? I suppose there would be no indiscretion in your letting me have a look at it?"

"None whatever, I should imagine, considering the position you occupy, Mr. Chubb."

I handed him the telegram without more ado; he fixed his double eyeglass on his nose, and read it through with much deliberation.

The message which had puzzled me so much ran as under:

"From Barker, B———, to Wix, Welby.—Tinker leaves by eight P.M. train to-morrow. Hurry up and have everything in readiness. The least delay may spoil all. X. returns on Thursday with lot of friends."

"I shall feel much obliged if you will allow me to take a copy of this document," said Mr. Chubb, gazing over the rim of his eyeglasses. Seeing, perhaps, that I hesitated, he hastened to add: "I may just whisper to you—but it must be a secret between you me and the post—that I've had my eye on our good friend Wix for some little time past. There's something about him that I can't make out, and I shan't rest satisfied till I do so. In any case, I'll take a copy of this telegram, and I'll be on the look-out when the eight o'clock from B——— reaches Welby to-morrow evening. I'm anxious to know whether Mr. Tinker will turn out to be anyone with whom I am acquainted."

II.

B———, which is one of the largest and most flourishing manufacturing and commercial towns in the central districts of England, is a little over seventy miles from Welby, and the fast trains between the two places occupy something over two hours in transit. As I was not on duty the evening following the receipt of this last message to Mr. Wix, I determined to imitate the example of the officer, and be on the look-out for the arrival of the mysterious Mr. Tinker by the eight o'clock train from B———.

The clock was striking ten as I strolled slowly down the platform. I saw no one there whom I knew except a few porters and other officials, but the train would not be due for another twelve minutes. As time went on I looked for the appearance of Mr. Chubb, but he was nowhere to be seen. It was nine minutes past ten when Mr. Wix walked through the entrance hall to the platform. Had he come to meet his friend Tinker? On that point there could be little doubt.

As Mr. Wix turned to come up the platform in the direction in which I was standing, I wheeled within the sheltering portals of the parcels office. Somehow I felt as if I did not want him to see me. Would not those suspicious eyes of his divine in a moment for what

purpose I was there? No, it would never do to let him see me watching for the train.

The parcels office window commanded a full view of the platform, and, partly hidden by a pyramid of empty fruit hampers, I could see all that was going on. The minutes were fleeting fast, but without bringing any signs of Chubb. What could possibly be detaining him? Mr. Wix, swinging his cane with his hands behind his back, was walking sedately to and fro, apparently seeing nothing and nobody.

The ring of a bell some distance away caused, as if by magic, the platform to become full of life and bustle. Porters, inspectors, policemen, and post office officials appeared on the scene almost as suddenly as if they had been propelled through so many trap-doors. Additional lamps were lighted, huge luggage baskets were wheeled out of their hiding places, and the Welby mail cart drove up with the letter bags just as the train came slowly to a standstill opposite the window where I was on the watch. And still Mr. Chubb was nowhere to be seen.

Mr. Wix, still swinging his cane behind him and standing a little way back from the bustle, looked the most unconcerned person there. It was evident that his friend, if he had arrived, was expected to look out for him, and presently I began to think that Mr. Tinker must have missed his train. But a minute later someone walked hurriedly up to Mr. Wix and shook him by the hand. He was a tall, dark, saturnine-looking man, with a black beard and spectacles, and he was dressed as a clergyman, with a white cravat, a soft felt hat, and a long overcoat. In one hand he carried a black leather bag, which seemed to contain something heavy. Could this be the Mr. Tinker of the telegram? It was a strange name for a clergyman, and a clergyman was a strange individual to form the subject of Mr. Wix's mysterious message.

The two men talked hurriedly together for a minute or two, and then turned and walked down the platform. I stole out of my hiding-place and followed cautiously. They bent their steps towards the refreshment-room, pushed open the swing-doors, and went in. After hesitating for a few seconds I followed boldly behind them: the refreshment-bar was as free to me as to them.

A portion of the bar at one end was divided into three or four semi-compartments, in one of which Mr. Wix and his friend had ensconced themselves. Stepping lightly across the floor I made my way into the compartment next theirs, which happened to be unoccupied. We were divided by a mahogany partition, about seven feet high. Nodding to the barmaid, with whom I had a slight acquaintance, I took a bun off the counter and began to munch it. So far I had not paused to ask myself what object I had in view. Led on by Chubb's hints of the previous day, it seemed to me as if the first act of some strange drama were working itself out before my eyes, and I was burning with curiosity to watch out its further progress.

The friends conversed in low tones, so that it was impossible for me even to guess the subject of their conversation; but two or three times Mr. Tinker, or whatever his name might be, elevated his voice a little more than was needful—I had an idea that, despite his clerical attire, he had been drinking—so that the other had to interpose a cautious "Hush!" or "Not so loud."

Of such fragments of their talk as did reach my ears I could make nothing. "Must be done to-night." "Too late to-morrow." How was I to fathom the meaning of phrases such as those. After that came more muttered conversation, and then a sound as of a sheet of paper being torn up. "Drink up, it's time to be off," I then heard Mr. Wix say, and a few seconds later the two men emerged from their compartment.

The collar of my coat was turned up as though I were a traveller, and I was in the act of drinking a cup of coffee as they passed out. Whether or not they took the trouble to glance into my compartment I had no means of knowing. The moment I heard the swing doors close I turned to follow them. Happening to glance at the fireplace as I crossed the room, I saw a crushed-up ball of paper, which had just been caught by the flames. Instinct told me that this was the paper which I had heard being torn up a minute previously. It was the work of a moment to snatch it out of the flames and press my foot on it till the last spark was smothered. Then stuffing the charred remains into my pocket, I hurried after the two men.

They were no longer to be seen. The train had gone on its way by this time, and only a few stragglers were left on the platform. I walked quickly through the entrance-hall and gazed up the lamp-lighted street that led from the station into the town. Yes—there in the distance I could dimly discern two figures, one of whom was carrying a bag. An instant later, and they took the turning which led towards Holly Cottage, and were lost to view. Where, oh! where was Mr. Chubb?

What ought I to do next? It would evidently be useless for me to dog the steps of Mr. Wix and his friend any farther. What business indeed had I to mix myself up in Mr. Wix's affairs in any way? What right had I to rescue from the flames a piece of paper which was evidently intended to be seen by no one? These questions I asked myself more than once. I could only answer them by telling myself that I fully believed if Mr. Chubb had been there he would have acted as I had acted. "But you are not a detective, Philip East, and Mr. Chubb is," whispered a voice within me.

By this time I was back again at the parcels office.

I walked in mechanically. The place was lighted up; a bright fire burnt in the grate. Should I or should I not reduce to ashes the half-charred paper in my pocket? For a moment or two I hesitated. As I did so the Superintendent's words seemed to impress themselves with double force upon me. And then that strange Mr.

Tinker? I could not think he was a real clergyman. If ever a man looked a make-believe and a sham, he did. Was there not, perhaps, some nefarious scheme afoot, which it might be my good fortune, nay, my duty, to assist in exposing and defeating? I hesitated no longer.

Choosing a quiet corner of the office immediately under a gas-jet, I drew forth the partially-burnt fragments of paper, and proceeded to unroll them, gingerly and carefully. They were so tightly squeezed up before being thrown into the grate, that only the two outer layers had been burnt through, and the next one scorched. One by one I unrolled them, smoothed them out, and spread them on the counter in front of me. Contrary to my expectations, they did not form themselves into a letter or written communication of any kind; I was not long in perceiving that the paper, when whole, had had traced upon it, in Indian ink, neither more nor less than a plan of the ground-floor of some mansion. A portion, of course, was now missing; but when such fragments as remained were duly fitted into their places, there could hardly be a doubt as to what the whole had been intended to represent. Each room was designated by its title, and among the fragments that remained intact could be traced the "library," the "dining-room," the "back drawing-room," the "butler's pantry," "a corridor leading to the conservatory," and so on. Without a doubt the plan of a gentleman's house. Of what possible value or interest could such a plan be to a man like Mr. Wix? More than ever I longed for the clear, shrewd head of the police superintendent.

While thus gazing at the restored fragments of the plan like a man half dazed, not seeing my way to a single step farther in the matter, my eye was attracted to a tiny cross in red ink, marked just outside one of the three windows of the room designated as the library. What could be the meaning of that little cross? Nowhere else on the plan was there another. It was close outside the centre window of the library—three bow windows they were. Had I not somewhere seen a library with three bow windows? Of a certainty I had—but where—where?

For two or three minutes I stood puzzling my brains, and calling to mind all the places I knew, likely and unlikely, that could by any possibility have a library with three windows. Then, all at once, it flashed across me that there was exactly such a library at Tenfield House, the seat of Sir Felix Drum. I had sat with my cousin many a time on the low cushioned seat that ran round the inner side of the centre bow window. Outside the library door, exactly as marked on the half-burnt plan, was a wide corridor, which ran from a glass door on one side of the house to a conservatory on the other; and on the left hand of the corridor stood a door which opened into the back drawing-room: in all this also the plan tallied exactly. Other points of similarity there were which convinced me that the

paper I had rescued from the flames was, in very truth, neither more nor less than a carefully drawn plan of the ground-floor of Tenfield House.

But of what possible use could such a plan be, either to Mr. Wix or his friend? I was lost in a maze of conjectures. It seemed to me at length that the best thing I could do would be to walk as far as the police-station and hunt up the Superintendent, who might have forgotten all about it. Accordingly, I put the plan in my pocket and set off. Just outside the station I encountered a policeman. "Can you tell me where I shall be likely to find Mr. Chubb?" I asked.

"Mr. Chubb, sir, is in London. He was called up to Scotland Yard by a telegram this afternoon."

Here was a dilemma. The telegram must have been received just after I had gone off duty, otherwise I should have known of it. What to do next I knew not. There was upon me an uneasy sense of responsibility, a feeling that I ought to do something, and at once. I sat down on a bench under one of the trees in the sidewalk to think. I called to mind, one by one, the fragmentary phrases which I had overheard in the refreshment-room.—"Everything in readiness."—"Must be done to-night."—"Start about one o'clock."—Could it be, was it possible, I suddenly asked myself—and the thought turned me first hot and then cold—that there was some vile scheme afloat to break into and rob the house of Sir Felix Drum?

I started to my feet like a man whose eyes have been suddenly dazzled. Such an idea seemed too incredible: and yet the more I thought of it the more impressed I became with the conviction that danger in one form or other threatened Tenfield House and its inmates. Then came the question: how best to avert this unknown danger? Should I go to the police-station and lay before Mr. Chubb's factotum the whole of the facts as they were known to me? No. I might only get laughed at and snubbed for my pains. Mr. Chubb's experience would at once have told him the proper course to pursue, but in his absence I shrank from appealing to his subordinates.

Would not the best plan be to hasten to Tenfield House and seek an interview with Sir Felix? When once I had laid the facts before him, the responsibility of further action would be shifted from my shoulders to his. Evidently the course I ought to take lay clear before me.

I looked at my watch. It wanted five minutes to eleven. A sharp walk of an hour across the fields would carry me to Tenfield House. Mr. Wix and his friend were not to start till one o'clock, and, supposing their destination to be the same as mine, Sir Felix would have ample time before their arrival on the scene to take whatever precautions might seem most advisable to him.

Now that I had decided what it was right to do I felt more at rest. But there was no time to lose, so I hurried to tell my landlady not

to expect me home yet, and set off for Tenfield House, with my stout blackthorn walking-stick. After getting clear of the suburbs of the town I did not meet a creature the whole of the way, but the road I took was a short cut through field-paths and lonely lanes. At length I reached the little ivy-covered lodge at the entrance to the park. Here lived Maxwell, the gardener, from whom I had had more than one sweet-smelling nosegay during the past summer.

I saw, to my surprise, that its inmates were not yet in bed. Through a chink in the shutters a tiny ray of light streamed forth into the darkness. What could have kept the inmates up till so late an hour? I knocked, and the door was answered by Maxwell in person. I told him that I wanted to see Sir Felix on a matter of great importance, and that it would be necessary for him to unlock the lodge gate in order to admit me.

"Sir Felix is from home," answered Maxwell, "but Mr. Binns is here: if you can tell him your business it may, perhaps, save you a journey up to the house. The fact is, it's my wife's birthday," added the gardener in a lower voice, "and we are keeping it up in a quiet way."

For a moment I felt doubtful what to do. The absence of Sir Felix was most unfortunate. But Binns was his trusted servant and major-domo, and it seemed to me that I could not do better than tell him all that I should otherwise have told his master.

Five minutes later Binns was in possession of all the facts of the case. He was a stout man of fifty, somewhat asthmatical and overfed, but with clear, resolute eyes, and a firm-set mouth, evidently a man with a will of his own, and not deficient in courage.

"There may be much in what you have just told me, Mr. East," he said, "or there may be nothing. But it's always best to be on the safe side, especially when there's such a lot of valuable plate to be responsible for as we happen to have in the house just now. When we have no company the plate is kept locked up at the Bank, but Sir Felix is coming home to-morrow, bringing friends with him, and there's to be grand doings for the next ten days. I fetched the plate from the Bank this afternoon."

Sir Felix coming home on the morrow, and bringing people with him? One of the lines in Mr. Wix's mysterious telegram was, "X. returns on Thursday with a lot of friends." Could it be the return of Sir Felix that was referred to in those strange terms?

"There's one thing," continued Binns: "we mustn't let the least hint of this affair reach her ladyship's ears. She would die of fright. She's the most timid and nervous woman I ever knew."

"But what do you propose to do?" I asked.

"What I propose to do, sir, is to sit up all night; and if the rascals come, I'll engage they'll have a warmer reception than they bargained for," answered he, with a grim smile. "Peter Maxwell, here, will go with me, and I'll call up Davis, the coachman. As for

the two footmen, I've no faith in 'em. They are new; and, for aught I know, may be linked in with those rascals. Somebody must have made that plan of the house, you know."

"Perhaps you have no objection to my joining you, Mr. Binns?"

"None whatever, sir, if you wish it: and we had best be going."

The lodge lights were put out, and we three men marched swiftly and silently through the starlit park to the house. Binns had a pass-key to one of the back entrances, and we were quickly inside his snug little sitting-room. Having lighted a lamp and produced a decanter and glasses, "I'll go and call Davis, while you wait here," said Binns. "He sleeps in the rooms over the stables."

"Is there anyone in the house still up?" asked I.

"Bless you, no. They're all in bed long ago. When Sir Felix is away her ladyship insists on keeping early hours. I, of course, am privileged," added the major-domo.

Away he went, and, at the end of ten minutes, returned with Davis, a stout-built, resolute-looking young fellow.

Mr. Binns's next move was to fetch four pairs of thick woollen socks of his own, of which he made each man put on a pair over his boots; with these he brought from some lumber-room half a dozen serviceable cudgels, that had not seen light since the gamekeepers had had a scrimmage with the poachers several years before. Of these we each chose one. By this time it was past one o'clock.

"I would give something to know at which particular window or door the rascals will try to effect an entrance," said Binns, presently.

"Are you sure that they will come at all?" asked the coachman.

"Of course I'm not. I told you so before, and I hope to goodness that they won't come. But what we have to do is to act as if we were sure they would come."

"Is the plate in a safe part of the house?" asked I.

"It is in a sort of strong room which opens out of my pantry. This room is without a window of any kind, and the window of my pantry is strongly barred. No use their trying to get in that way."

"My opinion is that they will try to effect an entrance through the middle window of the library. That red cross with which it is indicated on the plan is not without a meaning."

"By Jove! I shouldn't wonder if you are right, sir," responded Binns. He had studied the half-burnt plan at the lodge, and identified it as being one of the house.

"And now I come to think of it," he added, "the library windows are only secured by some trumpery old-fashioned shutters, that a practical burglar would make short work of. We must look specially after the library."

Mr. Binns lighted a small bull's-eye lantern, and extinguished the light in the sitting-room. With muffled feet we followed our leader in single file, guided by a slight ray from his lantern. Our first errand was to go the round of the house and ascertain that all the doors and

windows were properly secured, and that none of them had been tampered with. So far, everything proved satisfactory. The next thing was for Binns to divide his forces so as to put a watch on several points at once. Me he stationed in the library, Davis and he took each one end of the main corridor, while Maxwell did sentry duty at a door which led to the back premises.

While we waited thus in silence and darkness, the minutes seemed to pass slowly indeed, but in reality no long time had elapsed before I heard certain sounds outside. First, there was a faint crunching of gravel, as though someone had inadvertently put his foot on it; this was followed by a few words spoken in so low a tone that I could hardly be sure that it was not my fancy; and after that some hidden sense seemed to tell me—it was not the sense of hearing—that there were men moving about on the grass plot outside the middle window.

Silent as a shadow I crept to the door and gave a low "Hist" in the corridor outside. Binns was by my side in a moment. A whispered word in his ear, and the other men were called to the point of danger. And now we could plainly hear that the window was being forced from the outside. Binns and Davis slipped behind the heavy velvet curtains, one on each side the window, I was behind a screen, while Maxwell was hidden away beyond a high leather-backed chair. All this was done in the utmost silence.

By this time the fastenings of the window had yielded to the force brought to bear on them, and now the heavy sash was pushed up slowly and gently from without. It was wonderful how little noise the scoundrels made. There still remained the shutters, but they were an impediment that was quickly disposed of. In five or six minutes I saw them being pushed slowly back into the room, the dim starlight streamed in through the opening, and then ensued a silent pause of preparation on both sides. My heart beat quickly.

Presently a man vaulted noiselessly over the low window-sill into the room; an instant later he was followed by a second man. For a little while the two stood still and seemed to be listening intently; then, apparently satisfied that all was safe, one of them flashed the light of a dark lantern from end to end of the room, but nothing was visible save the book-lined walls and the massive oak furniture. A brief whispered colloquy ensued, and then with the lantern giving forth only a single ray of light they advanced slowly across the floor in the direction of the door. Now came Binns's signal. One note of a whistle and we were out of our hiding-places and had our men by the throat, two of us to one of them, before they had time to make a single movement on the offensive. Never were men more completely taken by surprise. Of a struggle there was scarcely any worth mentioning. They found their hands tied securely behind them almost before they knew what had happened. Binns threw the light of his lantern on their faces: Mr. Wix and Mr. Tinker, and no one but they, only the latter no longer wore his white tie and clerical coat.

"I suppose I have to thank *you* for this, young gentleman?" said Mr. Wix vindictively, the moment he recognised me.

We kept our prisoners company in Binns's sitting-room till break of day, when they were conveyed in a light cart to Welby police station.

Great was the consternation and astonishment of Lady Drum when told of what had taken place under her roof while she and the rest of the household were fast asleep; and great was the surprise of Sir Felix when he arrived from London in the course of the day and heard the narrative of the faithful Binns.

The telegram which had summoned Superintendent Chubb to Scotland Yard was a false one. It had doubtless been concocted by the prisoners or their confederates to get the lynx-eyed little man out of the way.

Mr. Wix and his friend turned out to be members of one of the most dangerous and skilful gangs of burglars in England, who had agents in nearly every large town, and whose main object was to plunder mansions of family plate, jewellery, and other valuables. It is only needful to say further of these two that their personal liberty was strictly curtailed for several years to come.

Previous to the trial one of the footmen disappeared suddenly from Tenfield House and was seen no more. Was it possible that he was in any way mixed up with the gang of burglars, and that it was he who had supplied them with the plan of the house? A question, this, which has no likelihood of being answered.

Not many months elapsed before I found myself appointed to a situation just double the value of the one at Welby. This was due to the influence of Sir Felix, whose kindness did not end there. Thus it fell out that, thanks to Mr. Wix's Mysterious Message, Lucy and I were enabled to get married long before we had dared to hope it.

LIFE IN PROVENCE.

BEFORE I begin to give you a faithful account of this beautiful country, of its people, of its daily life, I must ask you to take notice that this is no hasty sketch by a passing traveller, but the honest record of a resident who has pitched his tent under these sunny skies, and lives as other Provençals live, who are his neighbours and friends. When I add that it is some months since I have seen an Englishman, not to reckon how long since I have spoken to one, you will understand that French, Provençal, and Italian are the only sounds familiar to my ears.

We are not more than ten miles distant from the great naval station of the Mediterranean—Toulon; we are a little less distant from the town of Hyères; but we belong to neither, nor do we admire them. Indeed I think I may say that we look upon the large city with feelings of pity, and upon the upstart town, empty all summer long, with something of contempt.

And why? Because whenever or wherever we meet the people of Toulon, they are sighing for a whiff of our fresh sea breeze, praising our mountains and valleys, and longing for better roads that they may oftener wander along the myrtle walks which fringe our shores. We know also that Toulon is a town of dirty, narrow streets, with tower-like houses of many flats. And while we acknowledge the beauty of its harbour, the stateliness of its ironclad vessels, the brightness of its sunny promenade along the port, and its shady "Cours"—beneath whose noble plane trees is held daily one of the best, if not the very best, vegetable market in the world—yet we feel and know our own superiority, inasmuch as we have sun, shade, and sea breezes to boot: and we can tell them where their vegetables come from, for we grow most of them ourselves.

As to the inhabitants of Hyères, they are another people altogether. With few exceptions they are shopkeepers and hangers-on to the English winter colony. We rarely visit them in their town in summer, for it broils beneath a burning sun, and smells of its open sewers, if possible, worse than in winter. Some of the most enlightened and educated of their professional men take up their summer residence with us, and therein we see the results of refinement and education, which latter, were it made (as it is going to be made soon) compulsory in France, would raise our land here to fabulous prices, and bring half the world clamouring at our doors.

Such are our surroundings. Now take a look at us as we lie basking on the deep blue waters and girdled with mountains. Carqueiranne, when viewed from a height, represents a vast theatre, with mountains for the audience and a valley for the stage.

The particular range which encloses the valley is not very lofty, and is wooded to its summits; but this range is buttressed by more lofty peaks, which lift their bald crowns and cut the distant sky.

Faron, Coudon, and Fenouillet are beautiful specimens of mountains whose grandeur suggests an elevation they do not possess. Rising somewhat abruptly, and standing out as giants amidst their fellow mountains, they are crowned with fortresses (which are supposed to defend the harbour and arsenal of Toulon), erected by Napoleon and his successors to keep out the English, who once laid hands upon this arsenal of the Mediterranean.

From the "Black Mountain" in the west, Carqueiranne extends to a certain mysterious and magnificent unfinished château, with a lofty and elaborately worked stone tower on the north-east. This château has cost already millions of francs, and its destination is our one great mystery, which exercises our imagination and gives rise to endless surmises. It is built about half-way up a mountain, and commands splendid views of the bay, from all parts of which it is visible. Built of cut white stone, with fantastic architectural embellishments, vast as an Eastern palace, and surrounded by lofty palm trees, which were bought at fabulous prices, and transplanted, almost at full growth, by innumerable men and horses, this château seems destined for the retreat of some deposed monarch, or perhaps as the summer residence of some aspirant to the throne of France.

There are two other châteaux of some importance within our boundaries. One, the old Château of Carqueiranne, which is now the property of an energetic "primeur" farmer, but which once (if I can believe the statements of my native friends) was occupied for several years by Brunel, the Thames-tunnel engineer. The other, at our western limit, is now owned and occasionally occupied by Dr. Richet, one of the heads of the faculty of medicine in Paris. Strangers coming from Toulon are attracted by it, and ask "Who lives there?" When they hear that it is the great Paris physician, they begin to think that Carqueiranne is as healthy as it is beautiful: and they are quite right.

There is a history to this place, with which, however, I am only slightly acquainted. The Madame de Carqueiranne of the days of the monarchy before the Revolution has left a reputation similar to that of some of the ladies of Versailles. Her grandson is now a poor fisherman, who, in his old age, has been trying to get back the château, which belonged to his family years and years ago. Of course he either has failed or will fail. The old fellow tells me that his grandmother was the wickedest old witch that ever lived; so bad, indeed, that he cannot yet make up his mind to tell me her history, which, however, he promises to do some day. Meanwhile I must be content with this: She asked him, as she was dying, to shake hands and forgive. He refused point-blank, and sent her to the devil

without his blessing. Of this man I may have more to say presently, if my readers desire it.

Looked at from the sea, the valley of Carqueiranne almost disappears, and the land seems to descend gradually from the mountain tops to the shore. This sea view must have been more picturesque before high cultivation had made such rapid strides, because there are now, high up amidst the mountain pines, patches of land almost devoid of trees, which have been cleared and prepared for the cultivation of "primeurs" for the Paris market. This cleared land means wealth, progress, civilization: whatever the last term may mean and whatever its true value may be.

Here, even in Roman days, the land was not only partly cleared, not only beginning to be used, but cultivated from the sea-shore to the mountain top, and the population must have been far in excess of its present limits. I have myself seen a vine, still bearing good fruit, springing from an ancient and long over-grown terrace wall, which was planted in Roman days. Remnants of such terraces can still be traced all over the mountains, which even at our present rapid rate of growing will not be reached for another half century.

In those old Roman days vegetation must have been luxuriant, and the "Phylloxera," or vine disease, unknown; otherwise the vine to which I allude could not have survived.

The Romans evidently chose Carqueiranne, as the English have chosen Nice, Mentone and Cannes, for their pleasure resort, where they built their châteaux and villas, and where they could live, if at leisure, all the year round. Roman remains are everywhere plentiful, but especially at the point of one bay, which is called Almanarre, where a whole city lies exposed to view almost alongside the high road. Such is the solidity of its masonry that not even the sea, which has encroached upon and swallowed up a large portion of its buildings—not even the sea, with its constantly lashing waves, can break up the old walls, which stretch from the heights above down to the sea-shore and right out into the sea itself. These ruins of the city of Pomponiana still cover a space of some fourteen acres, which is partly enclosed within the walls of the Château de St. Salvador, and the city is said to have been founded in the days of Domitian.

Glance at the country as the Romans made it and probably left it.

From the sea-shore, all along the valley, there are vines planted in rows, between which grow wheat, oats, barley in summer, and garden vegetables in winter. Higher up, at the mountain foot, begin the grey-green olive trees, of every age and fantastic form, lifting their leaves to the breezes and changing from dull green to glittering silver-white. Higher up still, and to the very summits, where now the pine holds solitary sway, there were terraces upon terraces, faced with large loose stones and made deep by imported soil, where the vine was planted and covered the hills with one unbroken mantle of brilliant vegetation.

Here and there, sheltered from the mistral, were groves of orange and lemon trees, bearing at one and the same time blossom, bud and fruit, while the large gardens of the citizens, watered by deep wells, never put off their green from January to December, and never ceased to yield rich fruit and fragrant flower in any month of the year.

Alas! this picture will no longer serve me, owing to the decaying influences of time, for I believe that the world is wearing itself out and growing too feeble to resist its many foes.

The present picture is very lovely, but it is not the picture which the Romans saw. All the mountains are clothed in evergreens—pines, myrtles, junipers, arbutus, and other similar plants. The terraces are now far lower down the slopes, and the vines, where they exist at all, are diseased and unable to cover the nakedness of the soil. Oranges, which once formed one of the principal articles of commerce, have almost disappeared, for they also have had their malady and died.

This fertile land, which now has a house and family to almost every acre, would have been depopulated, despite its lovely climate, but for its discovery by the "primeur" growers, who have not only won back its former reputation, but bid fair to make it a gold mine.

We live now in a vast garden, cultivated chiefly by hand labour, which supplies Paris and Marseilles—not with all their vegetables—but with those which are ripe before they are even sown anywhere else, except in Algiers. And in Algiers the climate takes away their flavour, while the long voyage lands them in a state of incipient decay.

We hope to get back the vine some way or other, either by the disease wearing itself out, or by the plantation of American vines, whose root formation is more suited to resist the attacks of the insects called "Phylloxera." If we can overcome this vine disease, we shall settle down on the lees of the richest wine and fattest land in the universe. The farm varies in extent from two acres to eighteen, which latter figure is rarely exceeded. It is often hedged with roses, whose buds are sold in Paris during the winter season, sometimes as high as eight sous a-piece, while in summer they perfume the air and gladden the eye. The house is placed near the "Noria," or deep-well, worked by horse power, and generally so placed as to command a view of the whole farm. It is white, with red-tiled roof, clean inside and out, not wanting in comforts and luxuries, for money is abundant here.

The farmer is a robust, healthy, prosperous man, who works on his own land, more or less, as he happens to be higher or lower in the social scale, or as he happens to have been born and bred—for personal work is rather a matter of taste than of necessity. That is to say, hard, manual labour; for it must be clearly understood that personal superintendence and an occasional helping hand at packing, washing, sorting, or pruning, are absolutely essential to success.

The women are the stateliest, most queenlike specimens of their sex that I have ever seen. Tall, well-formed, strong, with piercing black eyes and bronzed faces, they charm the eye and attack the heart of the lover of the beautiful. There is ever, too, a smile upon their lips, a reflection of the sun's rays from their pretty faces, as they chatter in their rich old Provençal dialect.

In *any other country but France* these faces would photograph themselves upon the hearts of men, and rouse a passion which only its return could soothe. Men would love, live, fight, or die for the women of Provence—at least, Englishmen would—but such things are unknown in France. I do not say unknown here only, but unknown in France. The Paris exquisite may affect a taste in women as he does a taste in horses. He may even spend his time and money in their pursuit: but as a nation, and with but rare exceptions, the love of woman as woman does not exist in France.

To the Frenchman the woman is everything, except his heart's love. She is his business partner; in fact, the managing partner of the business while he lives at his café. In the country she is his labouring man, his purse keeper, his adviser, often his master. To the professional man she is the mother of his children, the bringer of a certain *dot* to the family store. In politics she is the centre around which men congregate. In religion, the deputy and representative of all mankind at church. But in the heart of a Frenchman she has no place and no home.

What I say generally of France, I say particularly of this place and all country places—marriages are made as business partnerships are made, with a due regard to business arrangements on all sides, and without any reference whatsoever to the impulses of the heart. Only a few days ago one of our handsomest young fellows gave up one of our prettiest girls, whose parents are rich, because the sum of hard cash to be handed over to him on the day of marriage was not equal to his demands. He will now, of course, look for another wife as he would look for another farm, with a sole regard to its income-bringing prospects.

The "primeur" farmer leaves just enough olive trees to provide him with oil for family use and give a little shelter to the land. The rest he clears away, to make room for his peas, potatoes, haricots, peaches, melons, almonds and grapes. His vines are planted in rows, between which he sows in November his peas, which ought to be ready for the Paris market during the first or second week in March. Peas do not like rain or need much water. They dread damp, and moist, easterly winds, and often prove a failure; but *one really good crop* will almost pay for the purchase of the land.

A friend of mine, who has verified my data from his books, and who is certainly not only one of the first, but, in point of intelligence, the very first man of his class, made last year, out of some nine acres

of peas, over 10,000 francs. He sold them in Paris at tenpence a pound, before anybody else was ready, and one day he received over a thousand francs for a single load, whose exact counterpart he sold a month later for two hundred francs. This will illustrate the importance of "primeurs," or the "first in the market."

What makes this place so celebrated for "primeurs" is the sea air and the southern exposure. We are fourteen days earlier than Hyères, which is far hotter than Carqueiranne at all seasons of the year. Africa can beat us in point of time, but the quality is nowhere. I have often been surprised that none of our produce is sent direct to London. Covent Garden is fed from Paris at second hand, and an English nobleman never has early vegetables as fresh or as sweet as a Paris "bourgeois."

After the pea crop come the potatoes, which are raised in the land devoted the previous year to peas, and often without manure. The potatoes sell, when fine and early, almost as well as peas, but between disease and light frosts they often prove a failure. Peas are not at all injured by frost or cold, whereas potatoes suffer immediately.

I am thus explicit and minute in my account of "primeur" growing, because I think that it is a business particularly suitable to some of our young English gentlemen, who long to employ their little capital in some business which will not derogate from their social position, and is both safe and not far from home.

The people of this land have an affection for English people which will secure them a hearty welcome as settlers, and they believe in English intelligence and English stability to increase the value of their commerce and secure the government of their country from revolutions. All that they ask is to be left in peace to their love of money-making. As to whether the government be republican, monarchical, or imperial they do not care a fig, if it can only be made permanent.

After the potato crop come the haricots, or French beans. These, like the peas and potatoes, yield an enormous profit, but they give the farmer some trouble. Peas and beans must be picked by hand. No machine is likely to be invented which could distinguish between ripe and unripe; so the farmer must employ a small army of women. Now women like out-of-door work; generally they refuse domestic service; they prefer their freedom. But then there are only a certain number in the place; and as all the crops come at the same time, growers are sadly puzzled to get them gathered.

The one great crop which remains after the haricots is both profitable and rare. I allude to an early grape crop for the Paris market, called "Chasselas."

My friend, to whom I have already referred, makes some 10,000 francs annually by his "Chasselas" grapes. True, his vines have the disease; but he reckons that, if a vine lasts four or five years, it has paid the full value of the land on which it grows.

This gentleman is quite a self-made man. He has risen to opulence on a piece of land of which not more than twenty acres are in cultivation, and he will end almost a Crœsus. He has frequently told me that his beautiful farm was carved (not twelve years since) out of waste land; that he has only expended on it money received from the sale of his crops; and yet now I feel certain that his income is not less than 20,000 francs a year, of which I am equally sure he does not spend one-third, although he has a charming wife and family and is surrounded with all local luxuries.

I would not have anyone think that his case is the rule; on the contrary, it is the exception. All our primeur-growers are thriving and well-to-do; but he is far in advance of all his fellows. His land is exceptionally well situated, while he is himself of an intelligence quite beyond the average.

About the beginning of August he will gather his "Chasselas," send them to Paris, and in some ten days his work will be over, with a beneficial result of about £300 sterling. After this crop is sold he will have little or nothing to do, save preparing his land, till the end of November, when pea-sowing begins. He often tells me that he has nothing to do. I see him almost daily at our little "cercle," where we enjoy together a chat or a game at cards.

The next subject which suggests itself to my mind is, "What society have you?" None whatsoever. I am "hail-fellow-well-met" with everybody—intimate with none. If I have a friend or two, ours is a friendship which makes no demands beyond those of neighbourly kindness, and fears no alarms. I like everybody, and therefore everybody ought to like me. There is an old family—perhaps a noble family—whose two male representatives are simple, honest farmers. I almost love them both—play billiards with both. To the elder I give ten points in fifty—the younger gives me fifteen. We sometimes venture to play for fivepence, but we never exceed that stake, which amounts to a "consommation."

They live in an old manor-house, which, looked at from the outside, has some pretensions; within, its arrangements are those of an ordinary farm-house. All the members of the family work on the land, but, I must say, as little as possible. They belong to a race which takes life easily. Their property is extensive—their income moderate, while their love of relaxation would shock the intelligent Englishman. They never emulate the attainments or success of my friend the primeur-grower, nor do they at all envy him. Their theory is, that now the grapes are gone their land will only yield them a small percentage, so that they enter no new paths, run no risks, incur no loss, make no fortune.

I have seen, in their simple home, ancient family portraits, the possession of which would make some of our distinction-loving ladies imagine themselves of almost royal descent. Of these my friends are

proud, but they found upon them no claims. Once I made them a chance visit, and found them entertaining, in the family living room, the rural postman and his mate, the bearer of the post-bag from the neighbouring town. On another occasion I formed one of a party of bowls, played in the mud and dust outside their front door. We were of all sorts and sizes, and were entertained with "vin cuit," sliced oranges, rum, brandy, and biscuits.

If I possess friends here, these are they. They are simple-hearted, gentle, sweet-tempered men, uncontaminated by that love of money which has eaten into most French people's hearts and souls.

It would be hard for a stranger to realise the all-absorbing avariciousness of the ordinary French men and women. They love money as a miser loves money. They only ask for peace, that they may gather together a store, sou by sou. Were it not for their strong family feeling, their general amiability of disposition, their polished manners and courtesy to strangers, they would be a nation of pedlars, and nothing more. It may be said generally, by one intimately acquainted with both nations, that the English are spendthrifts and the French misers.

There is another class of small farmers, with some of whom I am on terms of familiarity. They are, however, rare in this district. I mean growers of flowers for the Paris market.

Let us suppose ourselves on the main road, which runs alongside of the property of one of these friends, part of whose land is devoted to the cultivation of roses, hyacinths, and other flowers. He lives on his own freehold of about four acres, for which four acres he assures me that he would not accept £2,000 sterling, because they yield him, one year with another, 10,000 francs, or £400.

He has only 900 rose trees, his chief crop being white hyacinths; but these 900 rose trees produced one year (but mind, that was an exceptionally good year) 1,800 francs. His is a square piece of land, beautifully kept, with a neat little house of two floors in the middle. In front of the house is a court enclosed with trellis-work, over which are trained all sorts of flowering plants, while in the little garden which flanks it there are pines, oranges, lemons, grapes, figs, &c.

I entered it first as a perfect stranger, without invitation, being anxious to get some information about rose-growing. I found the mother, daughter, and son-in-law at home. Their table was strewn with lovely flowers waiting for packing; the room bore every mark of comfort; the people were as much at ease in the presence of a stranger as if he were their invited guest and they had known him for years. The old mother told me all she knew, but referred me to her husband for details. He was enjoying his afternoon at the café.

As I sat there the old lady pressed me to take refreshments, the little grandchildren played about my knees, the family sat talking or

listening, and made up a group of perfectly happy and perfectly contented country people, such as I have rarely seen in any of the many lands I have visited. I left them loaded with melon seeds, as I would not accept anything else, and I have since, on the advice of the farmer himself, planted some 3,000 roses in my own garden.

Speaking generally of the people, they are what we call here "propriétaires," *i.e.*, they own their own land. If you ask a man what he is himself, or what his neighbours are, his answer mostly is "propriétaire." It is a proud title, an assertion of wealth and of dignity. He may be a baker, a shoemaker, a barber, or a farmer; no matter, if he owns a piece of land, be it ever so tiny, he will claim to be called, not barber or baker, but "propriétaire." If you are not "propriétaire" you cannot be held to have permanently settled in the land. You may be "ouvrier," or "journalier," or rent a farm; but you are not one of the family if you do not own your own land.

Women work alongside of the men, but their work is lighter. In Brittany all sorts of hard work is put upon the women; here that is not the case.

Planting peas and potatoes, weeding, hoeing, gathering are the work of the women; "pioching" the work of the men. The land is worked with a "pioche," an instrument with two great prongs, which is thrown up over the head and dashed down into the earth. The spade is quite unknown: my gardener tried it with native Breton osbtinacy, and stuck to it, until he had nearly spoiled all the garden and lost all the crops. The great object is to keep the soil open, which the "pioche" does, and to go deep down, so as to secure moisture for the roots of plants after the sun has baked all the surface as hard as bricks. As a rule, men work well even in the broiling summer sun—at least, I know that any one of them puts my Breton gardener to shame; yet he used to shine out amidst his fellows at home. But they must be watched, or they will skulk, just as the Bretons did.

This part of Provence is decidedly a hard-working country, where wages are high and work is severe. Only good workers stay; the rest visit us, and then fly to other lands, where the masters are more sleepy or the soil less tough. But few people work on Sundays; none on fêtes. Nobody ever dreams of going to church. Even on Sundays the church is quite empty. There are rarely a dozen men at any service, even the most important. The congregation consists of half a dozen nuns, who keep a school, and take their scholars backwards and forwards some three times a day; add to these a dozen or two females, and the curé's army is complete. Never and nowhere have I ever seen public religion at so low an ebb.

If the church is neglected on Sundays and fêtes, the café and dance are remembered. The old and middle-aged men go to the marble tables to play dominoes, cards, or drafts, while the lads and lasses go to the adjoining ball-room, open to the high road and fitted round with benches, for a dance.

The other night—on the Fête of the Republic—I attended a large al-fresco ball for the purpose of taking notes. I must say that I was delighted. A piece of open road, in front of the "Mairie," had been enclosed with evergreens, and hung with Chinese lanterns; a stand for the musicians had been erected, and seats of all sorts improvised. It was eleven at night; they had commenced at 2 P.M., and danced till 6 P.M. Then they ceased for an hour to dine, and recommenced at 7 P.M., with the intention of keeping it up till two in the morning, just twelve hours in July, with the thermometer at 86°.

When I went they were in the thick of it, dancing quadrilles, waltzes, polkas, in the most proper manner, with just enough of drollery and self-assertion to give the thing flavour and not enough to make it vulgar. Fathers and mothers were there with their daughters and little children, which latter filled the dancing floor between the dances. The music was good. I saw old and young dancing; the late mayor and the present, the postman and the "garde," bakers, working men, propriétaires; all mingled as they could never mingle save in a land where democracy reigns without a rival.

I consider the Provençals a happy people; if they are not, their appearance greatly deceives, for they are always laughing, chattering, or singing in their rich old language, which is a mixture of Italian and French, without the languid softness of the one or the angularity of the other. As to dress, they have forgotten old-fashioned costumes and cultivated simplicity, at least as far as the men are concerned. The women, when not at work in the fields, seem to have lost all taste in dress. I was astonished to see the want of fashion—in fact, the want of any general style of female dress, at the ball the other night. On the other hand, with their short petticoats, neat stockings, and straw hats, they look, when at work, really beautiful.

Poverty is a word which finds no representative here. I have made it my business to seek out the poor, but I have failed to find any who would be considered worthy of being so called in England. Three families have sought and obtained my aid in distress; two of these lived on their own land, being "propriétaires," while the third was a farmer, living in a large house with good furniture, who had been stricken down with fever, and the family naturally felt a little helpless and alarmed, although two of its members were in good work and earning three francs a day. The land is rich, the people are rich, all is rich, all feel rich, because all save and none spend what they earn.

The loss of the vine has been both a national and local calamity; but here we are not at all downhearted; we plant and replant, and we drink wine still—not the same good rich wine as of yore, but wine and water at fivepence a litre, instead of good sound pure wine at three sous a litre, as it used to be. Meat is little sought after, nor is it much required in such a climate. Beef costs ninepence a pound, mutton tenpence, lamb tenpence, pork tenpence. Butter is naturally

dear, as none keep cows. In fact, milk and butter are not used by natives. They fry in oil, and if they allow themselves the luxury of a little milk now and then, they are content with goat's milk.

When I first came there was not a cow in all the country-side; now there are two, one belonging to my friend, the grower of "primeurs," and one to myself. These poor beasts never quit their stables, unless they are expressly sent out for a walk, which, until lately, has rarely been the case with mine. As, however, she suffered greatly from the heat in July, and began to give less milk, I have sent her out twice a day for a walk with her nurse—my Breton gardener—towards whom she behaves in a most unruly manner, especially trying to drown him in a large pond, into which she plunges as if mad.

We have no meadows. All our land is cultivated like a garden, so the poor horses and cows have no chance of a run. Nor have we green food. I thought, before I came here, that it was impossible to feed a cow on dry food and get much milk, but I find myself mistaken. Between bran, meal and hay we manage to get along, and to obtain a fair supply of milk and butter from a large Swiss cow. Vegetables are cheap and plentiful. So is fruit, such as apricots, peaches, grapes, figs, melons, pomegranates, apples, pears, &c.

Before I turn from this subject of supply, let me add that, so far as providing provisions of the best at a reasonable price is concerned, the resident has little or no difficulty; but if he is a housekeeper he must either get English, Swiss, or north of France servants, if he desires any domestic peace or comfort. The servants of Provence are simply the very worst, as regards both ability to serve and character, that can anywhere be found. I have lived in America, and know what it is to have an Irish help as independent as a wild Indian and as dirty as a pig. But I think these Provençal girls are worse than an Irish help, for two reasons: the first that they have no sort of character, and the second that they will not work. On the score of independence they are on a level, as also of dirt; but our servants here have the additional vices of indolence and dissipation.

The reason of all this is not far to seek. The independent farmer wants his women-folk at home; he has plenty of work indoors and out for them; so does the respectable ouvrier, for the French have small families, differing in this respect from the English, and have no need to send some members of the family out to make room for the rest. Hence the servant class is recruited from amongst those girls whose conduct at home has made them insupportable, or who have married and left their husbands, or who are the children of foreigners, who had no home, or who were left orphans when young.

It is not impossible to find a good servant, but it is very rare; so rare that all who know the difficulties of the situation either do without or get them from a distance.

Now about climate. To me it is almost perfection. Yet I feel

that some people would object to one of its peculiarities—viz., wind. Winter and summer the sun rises in its majesty to warm the air and cheer the heart. Winter and summer you can live out of doors all day long—in summer in the shade, in winter basking in the sun. Fevers, agues, and such like diseases are unknown here—and why? Because of the wind.

The wind is mostly a balmy sea breeze, fanning you and keeping you cool and fresh; but often it rises to a blast, and sometimes to a tempest; never yet has it broken down in my garden a single branch; but it sighs amidst the trees, or it riots over the bending heads of pines and eucalyptus trees.

To this wind I attribute the salubrity of the country. It prevents the accumulation of noxious gases, it freshens and purifies the air. If perchance there is a day without the sea breeze, we choke, we stifle; but so rarely is this the case, that I never remember to have experienced in this land the sensations I have described, although I have frequently done so in Syria.

Old men here are as lively as young men anywhere else. Two of my acquaintances play at billiards without spectacles, go out fishing at 3 A.M., play bowls better than younger men, and are, in short, in perfect health and strength, yet neither of them will see seventy-three again. Men and women attain here an extraordinary length of life, often verging on one hundred years. Many who were broken down invalids in other lands have here so entirely recovered their strength that, both before I came and since I have been here, the rejoicings of such and their laudations of this favoured land have been most familiar to my ears.

For my own part I see nothing that one could desire to alter, so far as climate is concerned, unless one prefers sickness to a stout breeze in summer, and a mistral in winter. My estimate of the average of high winds would be one every three or four days.

But oh! ere I close let me speak about "the sea, the sea, the open sea." Its colour is that of the jewels mentioned in Revelation, for I think the writer of that book got his ideas of brilliant colours from contemplating the Mediterranean and Adriatic seas. Its shores are "with verdure clad and ever green," differing therein much from the burnt-up-looking Isles of Greece. Our particular bay is formed by the "Presqu'ile de Giens" on the one side, and the mountain range which forms one large bay from Giens to the Rade of Toulon, if viewed from a great height, but subdivides into a series of smaller bays, of which ours is one.

We have no sailors here. There is one regular fishing-boat with its crew, and there are several solitary fishers, each possessing a boat, lines, baskets, and other gear, but none of these are sailors. Each one has a trade, or a bit of land, for winter occupation; thus making the sea an additional resource, and only venturing upon it during the fine seasons.

I have never seen a day when a Deal boat could not, and would not, have put out; but the slightest roughness deters these, our marine-territorials. Of course they are right. Their boats are not sea-rigged, and the mistral is a gusty and lusty wind, which raises short, foamy waves, of all waves the most dangerous to an open boat.

We spend a good deal of our time on this same brilliant-coloured, changing sea. If one is fond of fishing, it is "de rigueur" to start at 3 or 4 A.M., so as to reach the point of Giens by daybreak. Then and there, if lucky, you will catch a "bouille-abaisse," which will send you home a happy man.

"Bouille-abaisse"—the word is on every lip when there is question of a really good dinner. Call it fish-soup, or whatever else you please, it still remains the epicurean dream of a Provençal. He looks forward to it with eager anticipation; back upon it with fondest memories.

The manner of serving it is as follows: A large dish of bread cut into slices, which float in a thin gravy, is served first. The whole art of the cook lies (I imagine) in the preparation of this gravy. The fish which have been stewed in it, and which are frequently put upon the table beside the slices of bread, form of course the main ingredient, give the chief flavour to the gravy; but saffron and herbs of various sorts, known only to a good cook, are added, until a peculiar flavour is produced, which cannot be mistaken by either nostril or palate for anything else in the world; it is the odour of "Bouille-abaisse."

A lover of boating will find infinite amusement around the shores of Giens and among the isles of Hyères. Off the point of Giens there is a grotto, somewhat similar to that at Staffa on the west coast of Scotland, whereinto I have sailed and turned the boat round, mast still standing.

To me the greatest attraction of all is my garden, with its ample shade and its lovely sea views. Some four acres in extent, it offers almost as many varieties of culture as the four continents of the world. Here are the vines—there the kitchen garden, with rhubarb, parsnips and other northern vegetables, not forgetting the prickly-comfrey for the cow. Here are pomegranates, peaches, pears, apples, figs, quinces, which form a sort of orchard; there is the "parterre" with its Chinois oranges, its innumerable roses, its trained shrubs of every hue and shape. Here is the orangery, which shades the wall of my ladies' garden, with its winding walks, many-coloured double and single oleanders, which almost grow into trees, so much do they tower over the other shrubs.

My ladies' garden is ever full of odours, ever full of flowers. At all seasons of the year you may gather a lovely bouquet there. Geraniums are but weeds; they not only grow anywhere, but they flower freely with their roots in the air on the manure heap months after

they have been thrown aside. Violets are said to be modest folks, yet with us they assert themselves boldly by flinging out a perfume during winter and early spring, whose softness alone makes it endurable.

To enumerate the various flowering shrubs would be to make a gardener's catalogue. If truth must be told, flowering shrubs of lovely hues and sweet perfumes are our fate, because little flowerets with tiny roots wither and die beneath the summer sun. Yet of ferns we have a choice selection during the cooler months.

Repose with me beneath these cork oaks ere I bid you adieu. Cast your eye upon those splendid eucalypti; they are just ten years old and some fifty feet high. Down that shady walk lie the fish-ponds, and farther on the wilderness.

But enough of gardens. Give one final, longing, loving look to that sapphire-coloured sea, which stretches away from here along the coasts of Italy and Spain to Gibraltar, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli: give one long, loving look—and dream "of heaven."

ANOTHER YEAR.

THE vines I planted did not grow—
I saw them in my dreams in fair completeness
Make Heaven throughout my lonesome room,
In whispering snowy sweetness.
They tried awhile their languid life to raise,
As though in answer to my coaxing touch,
And then, like hearts whom we love over-much,
And twine about with all our hopes and praise,
They drooped and faded from the teeming earth,
Unknowing all the joy of coming days.
I fear their roots are dead, their leaves are sere—
And yet they may bloom forth another year.

Another year may warm the heart
That only throbs for self, all cold, untender;
The wild way meet some valley sweet,
Glowing in sunset splendour.
Another year, oh! in yon silent land
My mountains in their purple glory rise,
And olden dreams thrill 'neath the yearning skies:
I know that, though long exiled, I shall stand
Among my own once more, and hear their songs
Swell into glorious anthems sweetly grand.
Bend thou, O glorious Presence! ever near,
And bid me still hope on another year!

THE STORY OF AN OLD MAN'S DREAM.

FOUNDED ON FACT.

IT is a quaint old manor-house of which I write—there are many of them in Wiltshire—the plaster white, the woodwork painted black; a large, straggling house with a ruined tower at one end.

The rooms connecting the tower with the rest of the building are so dilapidated that they are quite uninhabitable, and within a stone's throw of the tower lies a dark-green, slimy pond—by courtesy a lake—overhung by weird old willow trees that seem to have peered over its sides for generations, to obtain a glimpse of their own reflections in the dusky, stagnant waters. The owner and occupier of this isolated mansion is Sir Charles Waresley, Baronet, an old gentleman in his eighty-second year, to whom I, Amy Dalton, am amanuensis.

He is a dear, kind old man, and I can scarcely wish myself a better lot; for, although the life is dull enough, he is an intelligent companion, is fond of books, and, what is more to the purpose, likes to talk of what he reads. Perhaps I should say of what is read to him—his eyesight naturally being somewhat impaired by age, the reading generally devolves on me. Altogether I have by no means a bad time of it here; at any rate, am so much happier than as pupil-teacher at a certain school near Kensington, that I would not return to those old days for ——

Hark—that is the master's bell! He has a peculiar way of ringing it when he wants me.

Running lightly along the corridor from my bed-room door to his—it is but a matter of fifty yards—I knock.

"Come in, Miss Amy." The voice does not sound so cheery as usual. I at once conjecture he is not well.

It is not customary for him to summon me thus early; he generally breakfasts in his own room at nine o'clock; then, with his heavy gold-headed cane on one side, and the butler, who has lived with him for at least five-and-twenty years, on the other, he hobbles down to his library, where I read to him the newspapers, sometimes his letters, and, after these, from any volume that his fancy may suggest.

To-day, on entering his bed-room and seeing him dressed and seated in his large arm-chair, I note that he looks worn and harassed.

"Good morning, sir. What can I do for you?"

"Sit down, my dear; sit down," pointing to a chair nearly opposite his own. "Did you—did you meet anyone in the corridor?" he asks, shading his eyes and looking at me inquiringly.

"No one, sir."

"Oblige me by opening the door softly. Make sure there is no one about and then come here."

I obey, and return to my seat, waiting for him to speak again. It is some time before he does so; then he asks abruptly:

"Are you superstitious, Miss Dalton?"

"No, sir. I have led far too matter-of-fact a life for that."

"Do you believe in dreams?"

"I have read most unaccountable stories of dreams, have heard strange instances related in which dreams have seemed prophetic; but personally I have had no experience in that way."

"Then if you dreamed something very unpleasant was going to happen to you, you would not allow such a dream to affect you?"

"Certainly not, sir," I affirm, anxious to reassure him, though not at the expense of truth, for I believe firmly what I say.

"Supposing, though, that you dream the same dream not once only, but twice. Supposing that, with a very short interval between, you dream it a third—a fourth time? That the dream gets a kind of hold over you, and forces itself upon you at last so strongly that the thought of it is scarcely ever absent from your mind—what would you say then, my dear?"

"I should not like it at all, sir. But I believe a great deal in the power of volition, and I think every night I could *will* not to dream that dream. I may be wrong, but I should have strong faith in conquering it thus."

He smiles slightly, and shakes his head. "I am an old man, my dear, and my faculties are not what they were. I either do not possess the power you name, or it is not strong enough. There is scarcely a night now that I am not haunted by this dream. And last night ——" He stops short, shuddering perceptibly.

"Shall I send for Dr. Rudd, Sir Charles?"

"No use. In fact, Miss Amy, I have already mentioned the matter to him; but he treats it lightly. Something must be done. But you can read now, my dear: I see you have the morning paper."

I read; and we talk afterwards of the leading article, the foreign intelligence, the state of the markets, and on various other topics, but all the while I am sure his thoughts are far away. At last he asks me suddenly: "If I should write a letter to-day, will you undertake to give it yourself direct into the postman's hands?"

"Certainly, Sir Charles."

"No one must know that I write it."

"No one shall know. I can bring writing materials to you here from my own room; now, or any time you like."

"Bring them now, then, only take care you are not seen."

I go, returning quickly, and no one is about to see me. Who could there be? Surely there is some mystery here I cannot fathom. No guests have ever stayed within these walls since I came, six months

ago. The servants—the old and trusted servants—who have lived for years with the old man, are the sole inhabitants of the place, save a pair of owls that have recently taken up their abode in the half-ruined tower. Then what is it Sir Charles can fear? At any rate, it is clearly no business of mine, and I am sent once more into the corridor, this time to keep guard outside the door, while the writing of the letter is accomplished.

On being summoned, I again return. Sir Charles, evidently much exhausted, is leaning back, but says, with a smile of satisfaction on his lips, "I have hit on a good plan of insuring secrecy."

He places the envelope containing his letter within another envelope, and asks me to direct the outer one. He tells me to address it to an old friend of his in London, to whom on several occasions I have had to write for him before, and again I am specially charged to deliver the letter myself to the rural postman, when he comes up to the house in the afternoon. Sir Charles seems relieved.

On taking my seat at the luncheon-table—lately he has insisted that I shall partake of that meal with him, and I make it my dinner—he says: "You look all the better for your walk, Miss Amy. Where did you gather those December roses?"

For the first moment I scarcely understand him, the next he chuckles quietly to himself, and adds: "An old man's joke, my dear; an old man's joke. You must not mind."

And I am glad that he can joke—it is a proof that for a time, at least, he has thrown off the evil influence of the dream.

But when evening closes—we are within ten days of Christmas, and there is little daylight after three o'clock—he becomes nervous and fidgety once more. Before retiring he says to me in the presence of Bailes:

"Miss Amy, I may not sleep to-night. If you hear my bell, at whatever hour it may ring, will you be sure and come to me?"

Before I can reply the butler speaks. "Isn't it a pity to disturb Miss Dalton, sir? I'll sit up with you myself, Sir Charles."

"No, thank you, Bailes. If I ring, it will be for Miss Dalton to read me to sleep. I know she will not mind the trouble."

There is a strange look on the master's face, and his eyes seek mine imploringly. "I am used to sitting up. I will come the instant you ring," is my reply.

I retire to my room, pile up the fire, divest myself of my dress, and, putting on a warm dressing-gown, after lighting the two candles on the mantelpiece, I sit down, stare into the red coals, and—think.

I think of the cold without and the warmth within. Of the days of drudgery of my past life, succeeded too often by nights spent in nursing and watching by the bedside of sick pupils, and I compare the trials of the past with the easy comfort of the present.

Ha! the bell! I start up hurriedly, light my bed-room candle, and

sally forth. The wind sweeping along the corridor extinguishes it; a little less haste and more care might have prevented that. I relight my candle, this time carefully guarding it with my hand, and, after rapping softly, enter the master's room.

"I'm glad you're come, Miss Amy. I've been nearly asleep half a hundred times."

"Well, sir, I'll read in a low monotonous voice, and I daresay you will be quite asleep in five minutes."

"But I don't want to go to sleep," he cries peevishly. "Don't you know I want to keep awake? I thought you understood."

I do understand now. He is afraid to sleep lest he should have a repetition of that dream. What could it be, I wonder? I take the cue.

"The snow is coming down fast, Sir Charles. It will be quite an old-fashioned Christmas. I expect we shall be snowed up for a week or two, at least. If you can rouse yourself sufficiently, I will make out a list of things at your dictation that will be wanted to keep the house going, and will give it to Mrs. Smart to-morrow."

"Don't be tiresome, Miss Amy! Is it likely that I can—can—think of such things now?" he says drowsily.

"Ah, there comes the sleet against the window pane. We shall have a hurricane directly. Sir Charles, I will put that blind up; you must look at the beautiful white snow drifting downwards. Do try to look."

"Don't be—don't—don't ——" and then by the breathing of the old man I know he is already more than half asleep.

I rearrange the clothes; whereupon he blinks at me impatiently. I stir the fire with as much noise as I can make. All of no use. The steady sonorous breathing goes on undisturbed, and thus an hour passes. I mark it by a timepiece on the wall.

I place fresh fuel upon the fire, this time softly, fearing to disturb the apparently restful slumber of the old man. I seat myself in an easy chair, and think of the falling snow. This thought soothes me. I lose myself, and I too fall asleep.

But what a sleep!

I dream a murder is being done. That someone has entered the room with stealthy step and is grasping the master by the throat. I try with all my might to scream—to wake. I spring from my chair on hearing sounds that make the blood curdle in my veins, for this is no dream, the sounds are real. I rush to the bed.

Sir Charles is sitting up. His eyes glare wildly round, one hand is pressed against his throat: he clutches it, and is groaning horribly. No one is there. It is some time before I can reassure him.

"Is it only a dream?" he gasps, as soon as he can speak. "This time, at least, I thought it all was real."

He questions me next as to what I have been doing; if I am sure no one has entered the room while I have slept—if I myself have been near the bed, or touched him?

The morning dawn finds him propped up upon his pillows, his right hand close locked in mine; but both of us are wide awake.

Next day he is exhausted, feverish, and I consult the housekeeper as to what should be done. Mrs. Smart does not strike me as at all a sympathetic person. She says I am too anxious; that it is only natural for old people to have fancies; she has known instances where they have had very strange fancies indeed when the mind was beginning to go. She wonders that Sir Charles should prefer a young girl like me to sit up with him instead of Mr. Bailes or herself, and cites it as a proof that the poor old gentleman's faculties are failing.

The weary, anxious day is drawing to a close when the startling event occurs of the arrival of a telegram for Sir Charles Waresley. I am reading aloud when Mrs. Smart comes in to deliver it. My master opens the envelope with shaking hands, and raising his double eye-glass reads the contents with a face betokening deep anxiety. His brow clears in a moment, however, and he addresses the housekeeper.

"Give orders for the carriage immediately. It must be at C—— station by five o'clock. I expect a friend by that train, a—a—gentleman. The blue room must be got ready for him."

"Dear me, sir! If I'd only had more time!"

"I could not let you know before I knew myself, could I?" he asks irritably.

Mrs. Smart departs, puzzled surprise on every feature, while Sir Charles reads again the telegram, smiling over it as though it were a love letter; but not a word on the subject does he vouchsafe to me.

I have had my tea in the housekeeper's room; I know the carriage has been despatched to C——, and Mrs. Smart expresses some curiosity as to what manner of guest will be brought back in it. I am not given to converse confidentially with Mrs. Smart. I do not like Mrs. Smart any more than I think she likes me. You see a face for the first time—if it strikes you in any way, you either like it or you do not. Mrs. Smart's face did strike me at the first and I did not like it. It is too plausible—too sleek; hiding any amount of acrimony. I do not like her thin papery blue-black silk gown any more than I like her black-and-white net cap, or the two flat drab bands of braided hair.

Very thankful indeed am I that I have not been taken into the master's confidence, for I can most truly tell her I am as much in ignorance as herself. When she finds she can elicit nothing, she leaves me, and I, retiring to my own snug room, sit beside the fire with my books and work. After a time there is an unwonted stir about the house—a hastening of footsteps to and fro—an opening and closing of doors. Sir Charles's visitor has come.

It is scarcely likely he will require me to read to-night, I think, as the evening wears on. But shortly before ten there comes a short,

smart summons on the library bell—the master's call for me. A vague wonder seizes me as I turn the handle of the library door.

"Come forward, Miss Dalton. Take a seat there," says Sir Charles cheerily, signing to a chair. "This is the young lady of whom I told you. She is my right hand, I think," he continues, addressing a gentleman—a clergyman—who has risen at my entrance, and who is scrutinizing me keenly. Sir Charles has not introduced him; but perhaps etiquette does not demand it. "Oblige me by ringing the bell—a long pull and a loud," adds Sir Charles to his friend.

No need for a prolonged peal; the bell is scarcely touched before the door is opened widely, and my surprise is great when Mrs. Smart and a troop of servants enter as though they had been waiting on the mat outside. At a wave of Sir Charles's hand they subside on to chairs, which until then I had not observed are ranged formally against the opposite wall. Mrs. Smart draws her seat somewhat more forward than the rest, as though she would assert thereby the superiority of her position in the household.

"Are all assembled?" asks a pleasant, musical voice, which does not seem unknown to me, and makes me start and look suddenly at the speaker.

After a silence, the master says: "I do not see Bailes."

"No, sir," answers Mrs. Smart.

"Did not I order you to see that *all* came in?"

"Yes, Sir Charles. But Mr. Bailes hopes that you'll excuse him. He says he's been a faithful follower of the freethinking persuasion all his life and he can't say no prayers he's not been used to."

"Nonsense. I insist on his being present. If the prayers he hears to-night hurt his feelings he need not attend again. Desire him to come in and judge for himself—as a freethinker should."

She disappears to report this to the refractory Bailes.

The clergyman is standing. When he lifts his eyes I am struck by the wonderful rapidity with which they dart from face to face along the row of servants. What a power of *grasp* there seems about those eyes! I feel that I have seen them somewhere before; but, when or where? Their owner is a man of about thirty years old, rather under than above the middle height, with a strong and firmly knit frame; broad shouldered and deep chested. His face is of a clear olive tint, and innocent of hair; that on his head is black and quite short.

The housekeeper and Bailes come in. The clergyman holds an English prayer-book, and as no one seems to know exactly what to do, he exclaims in a commanding voice, "Kneel down!"

He reads the general confession—the Lord's Prayer and a short collect. The whole affair does not last five minutes, and the servants appear so much surprised at the rapidity with which the prayers are gone through, that they do not attempt to leave the room, until Sir Charles speaks. "Mind, when this bell rings at half-past eight

to-morrow morning, I expect you all to assemble here again. Those who fail to do so are no longer in my service. Go!"

This command not being addressed to me I linger until the last; then bowing to the master and his guest, I say "Good-night."

"Stay!" cries the master. "You'll have no objection to be here for prayers to-morrow morning, will you, Miss Dalton?"

"Not the slightest, Sir Charles," and then I turn away.

The stranger glides to the door, opens it, bows with an impassive face—this time without looking at me, it would seem. I light my candle in the hall and there encounter the butler and Mrs. Smart, both waiting to see their master up to bed. The housekeeper speaks in an aggrieved tone:

"Another proof of what I told you, Miss Dalton. The poor dear old gentleman's just going clear off his head. He never could abear a priest, and now he's not only got one in the house, but we're to have prayer-meetings night and morning. It's *our* opinion Sir Charles believes the evil one is coming to carry him off some night on account of his godless life, and that the presence of the priest will scare him."

Next morning I enter the library before the prayer bell rings. I sit down in front of the fire, there to await the appointed time, and while staring at the red crackling logs my thoughts fly to the stranger guest. Where have I seen that face before—which somehow is like a familiar face, yet with a difference? Where have I heard that voice—which sounds perfectly well-known to me? I hear a movement in the room, and the subject of my thoughts comes forward.

"Pray do not disturb yourself," he says, bending his head slightly, as he seats himself on a low chair close by. In his dress he resembles an extreme Ritualist, but his looks and mannner puzzle me, they are so entirely opposed to my preconceived notions of a high-church clergyman. The fire begins to catch my face—I take a hand-screen from the mantel-piece to shade it.

"If you moved your chair a little farther back you would not need a screen," the gentleman observes sententiously.

"You did not detain us long at prayers last night," I say presently, now that the silence is once broken.

"Do you prefer long prayers? I fancied that, under the circumstances, in *this* house the prayers could hardly be too short."

"Of the circumstances to which you refer I know nothing," I reply shortly, and he not seeming disposed to enlighten me, I continue: "Have you a church in London? I cannot help thinking I have seen you somewhere; at any rate, I feel sure I have heard your voice—and yet I fail to remember where."

"If you have encountered me, Miss Dalton, and pay me the ill compliment of not remembering the particulars, it is scarcely worth while referring to the fact."

"Perhaps if I heard your name," I urge, "it would help my memory."

"My name—the Reverend John Smith—could scarcely have aided you. There is not much individuality about it, is there?"

"There is none."

"You look sceptical. Do you not believe that is my name?"

"Excuse me. I do *not*."

The clock chimes the half-hour; Mr. Smith rings the bell with a long, loud peal, and the servants troop in—all of them. As they take their places he runs his eyes from face to face along the row, then reads the same three prayers he read the night before, even more rapidly than he had read them then; and the service is ended. The domestics rise and disappear.

"Did you sleep well, Miss Dalton?" asks the clergyman, as I too am about to leave the room.

"Perfectly so."

"You—you do not walk in your sleep, I suppose?" he inquires.

"Walk in my sleep? I am quite certain I never did such a thing in all my life," I answer, laughing carelessly.

"I am glad to be assured you do not. It is nothing to laugh at," he adds. "Somnambulism is a sad affliction, and has been the cause of many a terrible catastrophe. Even murders have been done —— Where are you going now?"

"Really, Mr.—Smith! To my breakfast, in the housekeeper's room," I reply, rather indignantly.

"Pardon me. It was arranged last night that I should have the pleasure of your company at that meal in the dining-room."

I regard him in surprise; but at that moment Bailes appears.

"Breakfast is served for Miss Dalton and yourself," announces that functionary, looking at the clergyman with a supercilious air. Evidently he does not favour his master's guest.

Breakfast passes off quietly. Mr. Smith, obviously desirous of leading me to talk of Sir Charles, asks many questions about him, which I parry as adroitly as I can. He next inquires concerning the ways of the house—the servants; and though he asks for information with the evident desire of obtaining it, yet I am struck with the wonderful knowledge he displays of the special characteristics of each member of the household. He seems to know them better than I, who have now been six months here, and he not many hours. After luncheon Sir Charles drives out with him.

The days pass on. The threatened snow-storm has spent its force elsewhere—at all events, we have not had it—and seven days and nights have come and gone since the arrival of the Reverend John Smith. He seems to have settled down into his place as though it had been his always; and even the servants, as he never interferes with them, do not now resent his presence. I have obtained no clue as to the relative positions of the master and himself; and though I am much in the company of both not a word has been dropped that will account for the reason of his visit—the probable duration of it,

or, in fact, a single hint as to Mr. Smith's status in the outer world. Mrs. Smart still adheres to her belief that he has come to exorcise the spirits of evil. Bailes is of the same way of thinking as herself; and, by common consent in the servants' hall, "Sir Charles's private chaplain" is the title by which the stranger guest is known.

But Christmas Eve has come and gone, for the day is over.

I have slept remarkably well of late—a calm and almost dreamless sleep, lasting till daylight; but to-night I do not feel disposed to it. When partly undressed, I fold my comfortable dressing-gown around me, and, with my feet in my warm slippers, sit looking into the embers. "Seeing faces in the fire" has ever had a certain amount of fascination for me, and this night the grate seems full of them. Among them is one that stands out from the rest—a queer-looking red piece of wood that somehow resembles in a remarkable manner Sir Charles's chaplain. The two bright eyes seem to stare at me with a provoking twinkle. The fire, beginning at last to die out, leaves its brightness in those eyes alone, while below, where the short, square chin has appeared to end, the wood shows now all charred and blackened, suggestive of a beard.

"If Mr. Smith only had a beard!" think I, smiling to myself.

Ah! A strange flash of light has come—a recollection furnishing a clue! I *have* seen Mr. Smith before!

Memory flies back a year. I am in an omnibus, taking some pupils to the school at Kensington. I discover I have lost my purse. A gentleman, sitting opposite, seems to take interest in the matter, interrogating me as to the distance I have come, if I think my pocket has been picked, and, in the latter case, have I a suspicion who is the thief? I feel sure I have been robbed—but how, when, or where I cannot say; but the pleasant manner in which he insists on paying my fare relieves me from all embarrassment, and furnishes an agreeable incident in a life which has known few. But I recollect all this: and if the hero of this small adventure in the omnibus was not the Reverend John Smith—minus the clerical attire, and plus a beard—I will never trust myself to recognise either a face or a voice again!

All this while the fire has been getting lower and lower; it is scarcely worth while replenishing it in the small hours of the morning; but with the view of rekindling a glow in the quickly blackening wood I have taken the poker up, when I am startled by a sound without. Stealthy footsteps are passing by, outside my door!

I go there on tiptoe, and, after listening a few seconds, turn the handle cautiously and look out.

The moon is shining faintly through the end window of the corridor—that end beyond the master's room. At the other end are large green-baize doors, shutting off the ruined apartments in the tower. Is it my fancy, or do I see these doors open, then close noiselessly again, and all is still? Surely it is not my imagination that has

deceived me? And yet I am told the doors have not been used for years. Who can have passed through them thus at dead of night?

As I stand peering out into the darkness, gradually my eyes become so accustomed to it that I can discern a figure not many paces off concealing itself in a recess. At first I take it for a shadow, until it moves a few steps farther, stops, glides on, then stops again. It is enveloped in a long dark garment, one corner of which appears to be drawn over the head like a monk's cowl. The form is not that of a tall person; on the contrary, somewhat short and square. Conviction rushes over me that it is none other than Sir Charles's chaplain, and that he is—what he asked if I was—a somnambulist. His own words recur to my recollection: "Somnambulism is a sad affliction, and has been the cause of many a terrible catastrophe." Suppose he should be able to open those doors, that he should enter the ruined towers, and there encounter—what?

Without daring to waste time in consideration, I snatch up my lighted candle, and springing lightly forward, past the sleep-walker, stand facing him to bar the way.

The moonlight, shining, as I have said, into the window, at the other end of the passage, must make my form distinctly visible to any one awake; but somnambulists are not supposed to see. To the thought of my own appearance I give no heed; my intention is to gently lead him back to his own room. What is my astonishment on hearing him exclaim, in a surprised and agitated whisper: "Miss Dalton! What on earth has brought you here? Explain!"

"I thought you were walking in your sleep, sir, and I wished to prevent your entering the tower, lest harm might happen to you."

Forcibly drawing me back, he whispers cautiously: "What have you seen?"

"I don't know. Some person, or persons, seemed to pass through those doors."

"Did you recognise them?"

"No. I only saw the doors close as though a shadow had passed in."

"Go into your room, young lady. Hush! not a word until to-morrow. Lock your door."

My fire is out, I find. I go to bed in a chaos of excitement.

Next morning I am in the library a few minutes before prayer-time. Sir Charles's chaplain is already there.

"Good morning, sir," I say, and he returns the salutation briefly and coldly. The good Christmas wishes I had been prepared to greet him with die on my lips unuttered. The bell is rung, the servants enter, the prayers are hurried through as usual.

Mr. Smith and I breakfast together, and with the exception of a few passing comments on the weather, which has turned wonderfully mild and genial for the time of year, the conversation, as such, is not

M. ELLEN EDWARDS.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

AFTER LISTENING A FEW SECONDS, I OPEN THE DOOR AND LOOK OUT.

worthy of the name. By eleven o'clock Sir Charles is in his library. When I am preparing to read, Mr. Smith suddenly asks to be shown the interior of the ruined tower.

"I am interested in antiquities, Sir Charles; know something about them in fact. Could not we manage to go there now?"

"Nothing easier; if you'll lend me an arm, and—get me the keys. Bailes keeps them."

"Excuse me. I prefer not troubling Mr. Bailes at present. I have an 'open sesame' which was never known to fail."

With his heavy gold-headed cane supporting him on one side, the clergyman's arm on the other, the master leaves the room and proceeds slowly and laboriously up the stairs; I following behind.

On arriving at the end of the corridor they halt. Mr. Smith takes a large bunch of keys from his pocket. Not one of them fits, however. Next he produces an instrument which he inserts noiselessly into the lock, and the doors fly open.

An unpleasant musty odour first assails us, and I glance round inquiringly at the mouldering walls through which the damp has penetrated, and then on beyond to where a glimpse of sky is visible above the roofless tower. Mr. Smith seems to have entirely forgotten his vaunted interest in antiquities. He gives but a hurried survey, and strides forward.

"Ha! here is one receptacle, Sir Charles! And now to solve the mystery."

He falls on his knees in front of a large black box, while my eyes are riveted on him in wonder and amaze, and is dexterously applying some tools to the lock—in the use of which he is evidently an adept. In a few seconds the lid is open, and we are all three inspecting the contents.

These are composed of plate and linen, jewels, money, books, and various other valuables. Some large silver tankards especially attract notice. Sir Charles points to the device engraved upon them, looking at Mr. Smith.

"A bishop's mitre and initials," observes the latter, smiling slightly. "His lordship's plate traced at last!"

"And so, Miss Amy, it seems that you too have suspected my old and faithful servants, and been on the watch!" exclaims Sir Charles.

"No. It was by the purest accident I happened to see anything last night, sir."

"Miss Dalton suspected nothing, sir," says Mr. Smith. "She heard something, saw me in the corridor, and came out, with the idea of—seeing that I came to no harm."

Here he gives me a look that is at once half grateful, half amused; whereon I feel my face burn furiously.

"Let us leave these ungenial quarters," says the master hastily. "In the library we will tell Miss Dalton everything."

"When I shall venture to hope the young lady will be on my side, and ask for punishment to be meted out to the offenders."

But there is a determined look on Sir Charles's face as he turns round full upon the speaker. "Not that," he says, emphatically; "you only waste words by asking it."

As we turn to go, Mr. Smith whispers in my ear: "I make a good clergyman; don't you think so?"

To which remark, being more question than assertion, I cannot resist retorting: "You would make even a better detective, sir."

Whereon his eyes meet mine with a quick gleam in them expressive of pleasure, though I felt almost afraid I had gone too far.

When we reach the library, and are seated, Sir Charles speaks; leaning his two hands on his gold-headed cane.

"My dear young lady, I have lived many years alone here; it has been my choice. Thirty-two years ago I quarrelled with my only living relative—a sister—for marrying a man beneath her; I have never seen her since, and we cannot meet again in this world now, for she is dead. I tell you this to show you what a solitary being I am, at the mercy of certain members of my household, who, I had every reason to believe, were devoted to me. One night, Miss Dalton, I dreamed a dream of which I took little or no notice at the time; but its constant recurrence made at last so indelible an impression on my mind that the thought of it was scarcely ever absent."

"And what was the dream, sir?"

"The dream took many forms and phases, but the drift of it was always this: that my two oldest servants, Bailes and Smart, had laid a plan to rob and murder me. Sometimes I dreamed the deed was being done, and once I awoke in terrible agony—it seemed a hand was strangling me, and that hand the hand of—Bailes. You remember the night, Miss Amy: that on which you sat up with me. It was the terrible semblance of reality on that occasion which decided me next morning to take the steps I did, and write to ask a friend to send me a detective down from London. Mr. Smith came, and has been on the watch."

"I suppose you have been robbed, Sir Charles."

"That I have been systematically robbed for a considerable time there is not a shadow of a doubt. Nor do I hesitate to believe that a robbery of a more serious nature still was contemplated to take place last night. I daresay you have noticed the safe that is built into the wall in my bed-room, Miss Amy? Very well. In it is some very old and very valuable gold plate, which, perhaps, a more cautious man would have kept at his banker's. The key is never out of my possession during the day, and at night it lies beneath my pillow. Last night Mr. Smith, watching as usual, saw Bailes and Mrs. Smart approach my door. The latter was in the act of opening it with a false key, when something seems suddenly to have alarmed them, and disturbed them from their purpose. At any rate, they fled with one

accord through the green-baize doors, closing and fastening them behind them. Had they succeeded in entering my room it could have been but with one intent—to take the key from beneath my pillow while I slept, to steal the gold plate from my safe, and, if need be, murder me. Then my oft-repeated dream would have been verified."

"What shall you do, sir?"

"Miss Dalton, this is Christmas Day. I am not a religious man—far from it—yet some reminiscences of my childhood's days remain; the strongest of all, possibly, are those connected with this Christmas season, of which the time-honoured axiom, 'peace, good-will on earth,' seems to me the watchword. To-day I will do nothing. To-morrow Mr. Smith will see the culprits, and, with my authority, dismiss them with a warning."

I respect my master's scruples more, I think, than does Mr. Smith. The pseudo-clergyman makes an impatient gesture, seems about to say something, checks himself; then suddenly speaks out.

"This, then, is your final decision, sir?"

"It is."

We certainly do not spend a merry Christmas Day.

Bailes waits upon the luncheon table without the slightest difference discernable in his looks or demeanour. His one lock of white hair has the appearance of being combed with unwonted care over his baldness, and he is, if anything, a little more jaunty in his manner—possibly at the thought of the extra good dinner awaiting him in honour of the day. It seems to me that I have a more guilty feeling, far, than he. I scarcely like to look at him—knowing what I do!

In the afternoon I stroll into the garden, find a few sweet violets hidden among their leaves, then return quickly to the house on seeing Mr. Smith coming towards me on a distant path.

At dinner—which takes place at seven o'clock—we have the time-honoured Christmas fare, and Bailes places the huge roast of beef, the colossal turkey, upon the cloth with as much pomposity as though he were serving at a banquet. The master makes a hearty meal, and he and Mr. Smith keep up an animated conversation. As to myself, I must confess to a feeling of weariness, and am rallied for my silence.

"Two can converse better than three, sir," I say, in answer to the master; and the next moment I am vexed to have so thoughtlessly spoken, for Sir Charles looks across at me in amused surprise.

"What, Miss Amy? Jealous because the old man has found something fresh to interest him? Nay, nay, my dear. Mr. Smith leaves us to-morrow, and then I shall be as dependent upon you as ever."

Before ten o'clock I plead fatigue and say good night. Mr. Smith comes after me into the hall, and lights my candle. I take it from his hand.

"You are nervous," he says. "You have a dread that something unpleasant will come out of last night's work?"

"I have an uncomfortable foreboding, I confess—but I can define it as nothing more. Good night."

"Good night."

On the stairs the housekeeper is standing. She touches my arm as I pass. A curious smile, one that I do not like, is on her lips.

"Are you in the secret?" she whispers in a meaning tone.

"I am going to bed. I do not understand you," I answer.

"I want a few words with you, Miss Dalton. Will you come to my room or shall I enter yours?"

"I am tired and sleepy, Mrs. Smart. Some other time."

"Some other time may be too late. I'll just step in now, and when I tell you what I've got to tell, we'll maybe understand each other better."

She pushes open my bedroom door, and follows me in determinedly. I walk to the fire, place my candlestick upon the shelf, and stand warming myself for a few seconds before turning round to look at her. Yes, Mr. Smith was right. I do feel nervous to-night; but it will never do to let this woman see that I am trembling.

"Miss Dalton, who *is* Mr. Smith?"

These words, uttered close to my ear in a startling whisper, are not words calculated to reassure me. My answer is given hurriedly, with some perturbation of manner I cannot hide.

"Sir Charles Waresley said he was a friend. I do not see what you or I have to do with anything beyond that."

She looks at me, keenly suspicious. "He's not what he seems," she says, her sharp light eyes full on my face. "He's a wolf in sheep's clothing."

"Mrs. Smart, will you leave me ——"

"He's been making up to you—ingratiating himself with you—making love to you, for aught I know—to serve his own ends ——"

"I will not listen to another word! If you will not leave my room at once, I shall be compelled to do so."

"Not till I learn how far you and he are accomplices," she says, with a strange laugh, placing herself somewhat nearer the door, so that her gaunt figure cuts off my retreat.

I even yet shudder at the remembrance of the fears that possessed me at that moment. Is it possible she will murder me, I think: does she believe I have discovered her guilty secret? I hardly know whether her next words reassure or surprise me most.

"If the master makes him his heir, will you take his side or ours?"

"His heir?"

"Has Mr. Smith not told you who he is?"

"Indeed, no!"

"Ha! You are not in the secret then? Now look here, Miss Dalton: I've reasons, and so has Mr. Bailes, for suspecting this

young man to be no other than the master's nephew, the son of his only sister who displeased him by her marriage. He never forgave her for it. Miss Marian went away to America with her husband some thirty years ago. Both she and he died there; but they had a son, and you may take my word for it, my dear, he is no other than this young man. We can see the likeness. And Bailes thinks it was a Mr. Smith she married; but it's long ago, and he's not sure. If he is made the heir, and comes to live here, he'll upset everything. One can see how imperious he is. The master won't be able to call his soul his own, let alone his house and worldly goods. As to poor old Bailes and me ——"

At that moment the prayer bell rings out loud and clear. I never was so thankful for a bell in my life. Mrs. Smart leaves hurriedly, I closing and locking the door behind her. Could there be fact in this fancy of hers?

A sound sleep and a dreamless falls on me. When I awake suddenly to consciousness a sound is ringing in my ears as of a wild and distant scream. Sitting up in bed I listen with every nerve at fullest stretch, and then, trembling more with the chilly feeling that intense fear creates than with the cold of the December night, I spring from the bed, open the window, and listen again with an intentness that is pain. But not a sound is to be heard—not a movement, inside the house or out, disturbs the almost unnatural stillness. The waning morning moon shines dimly, but the heavens are ablaze with stars; even my particular aversion—the dark-green, slimy pond—appears a picturesquely pleasing object beneath that glittering canopy.

I wonder—can I have dreamt about the scream? It may be so; but still the echo of it seems to linger in my ears, and even after I once more compose myself to rest, again and again returns the memory of that dismal cry—a woman's half-stifled shriek—borne from a distance on the outer silence of the night.

On leaving my room somewhat later than my usual hour —owing to the fact that I have not been called—I find an unwonted stir and confusion in the hall. The servants are standing there—some are sobbing hysterically—all have white, scared faces—and when I ask what is the matter everyone begins to talk at once. Before it is possible to understand anything, a young girl, who has apparently stationed herself outside the house, rushes in with a shriek, throws up her arms, crying "Oh, mercy on us, here they come!" and falls forward in a dead faint upon the floor.

Two men—whom I recognise as Mr. Smith and the gardener—are approaching, carrying between them a board on which an apparently dead body lies. The face is hidden, over it a man's coat is spread, and I note that Mr. Smith wears none. But it does not need for me to see the face to recognise the long, gaunt form as that of Sir Charles's housekeeper.

"Make way," cries Mr. Smith in a stern, set voice; and I try to drag aside the fainting girl. I never saw death face to face. Even now I do not look upon it, but I recognise its presence, and, as the ghastly burden is carried past me into a side room, I feel faint and dizzy, and catching at the doorway for support I close my eyes. Presently the door is opened quickly, and Mr. Smith is by my side. He lays his hand on my shoulder: the firm touch seems to impart strength.

"Listen!" he says in a voice that instantly commands attention, arresting the sobs of the hysterical women. "If I were what I seem—a priest—I might preach a sermon to you; but I am not. Instead of that, I am an officer in the Detective Police Force—unfortunately, I fear, quite as necessary an institution as that of the priesthood. In my official capacity I came here and discovered that an extensive and systematic robbery was being carried on by Bailes, the butler, and by Mrs. Smart. Late last night they somehow discovered, I fancy by listening at the library door, that their crime was known. Bailes has absconded with all he could conveniently carry; nevertheless, your master will not have him punished or pursued. Mrs. Smart, on finding herself forsaken by the partner of her guilt, terrified at having to face the brunt alone, drowned herself this morning at daybreak in the willow pond." So speaking, he then, and not till then, removes his hand from my shoulder.

"Miss Dalton, come with me to Sir Charles," he adds, quite gently; and mechanically I obey.

The master has not left his room. He is in his accustomed chair. His thick-quilted dressing-gown is round his shoulders, and he sits propped up by pillows. A worn and anxious look is on his face.

"Well, well?" he says, nervously. "What more?"

"Not much, sir," Mr. Smith answers composedly. "We have brought the unfortunate woman here, as you desired. There must, of course, be an inquest. But ——"

"Manage everything, Smith. I place implicit faith in you. But —are you convinced she—drowned *herself?*" Sir Charles inquires, anxiously.

"I am. I found this on her dressing-table," and he places a large prayer-book in Sir Charles's hands. "It is a significant fact that the book was open at this page."

And the old man's hand trembles as he reads in large letters at the top:

"*The Order for the Burial of the Dead.*"

Mr. Smith, by Sir Charles's desire, takes command of everything inside the house and out. And when I see all this I think, for the first time, of the dead woman's words.

It is nearly a week, now, since all this happened, and it is New Year's Eve.

The days have seemed to go by very slowly, despite the excitement of the inquest, and of other legal formalities incidental to the painful events that had transpired. Sir Charles has been ill, too, and his medical man has come daily. But he is better now.

Bailes has not been heard of. It is supposed he has gone abroad. Everything he owned, including a goodly deposit at the Bank at C——, has disappeared along with him, and Sir Charles will have no inquiries made. On searching Mrs. Smart's room, ample evidence of her complicity was found in drawers and wardrobe. The things we had seen in the chest proved to belong to the Bishop of Z——, who, for a year past, had been living abroad for his health, and the housekeeper left in charge was a near relation of Bailes. He had given the stolen goods houseroom. "A bad lot!" said Mr. Smith emphatically of Bailes and his friends. Of course the goods were restored to the Bishop. His worthless housekeeper had decamped with Bailes, he having found means to warn her of her danger.

It is New Year's Eve, as I have said. Sir Charles Waresley and I are in the library, towards the close of the afternoon. Our thoughts are occupied by Mr. Smith, a letter from whom was received this morning by the master, and now lies beside him open on the table. I can make out each word of the firm, bold, rounded writing, even from the seat where I am sitting, on the opposite side of the hearth.

"London, Dec. 30th.

"DEAR SIR CHARLES,—Our business relations are ended; but the tone of your invitation precludes the possibility of its rejection—at least by me. I will be with you to-morrow, though I must own it is with the utmost difficulty I snatch this brief holiday.

"I am, dear sir, yours faithfully,

"J. C. W. SMITH."

Smith! And why *not* Smith? I ponder as I stare into the fire. John Smith! But at least there are those two other initials. What do they stand for? Ah! A sudden flash of thought reveals to me a possibility. I feel that I am smiling to myself, when an interruption comes in the loud ringing of the front door bell. A few seconds more and the stir of an arrival is distinctly heard, the library door is thrown open, and the subject of my thoughts announced.

Sir Charles rises, welcoming him warmly, so warmly and heartily that my heart glows with pleasure at the sight; and I am about to pass softly and unobserved from the room when Mr. Smith turns round suddenly, and with one of his eagle glances arrests me, holding out his hand. As I place mine in it our eyes meet, and his clasp grows firmer, while I look away embarrassed; for I feel guilty of knowing what I should not know.

How pleasantly the minutes glide away, and how genial is the manner of Sir Charles! The guest has doffed his clerical attire. It is proposed we shall sit-in the New Year later on—we three together.

"The old year is dying fast. You, Mr. Smith, will naturally see many more New Years, and so will you, Miss Amy; but for myself ——" and then Sir Charles stops abruptly.

"I hope you may see many too, sir—that is if they be happy ones," I exclaim, impulsively.

"Thank you for the wish, my dear. You qualify it wisely; for I am *alone*. Miss Amy, do you know I have begun to realise that I am a very solitary old man!"

"But surely, sir, there is no necessity to live alone? Have you no near relation? Could you not find one *anywhere?*" I ask, trembling inwardly at my own temerity.

"To my knowledge I have none," he answers, "except a nephew, whom I shall now delegate Mr. Smith to find for me."

This remark is sufficiently startling in itself, even divested of the emphasis with which he speaks it. Perhaps it startles another more than me. At any rate, the guest lays down his newspaper quickly, and looks round. I read in his face that a struggle is going forward in his mind which he would fain conceal from both of us. He does not speak, but looks keenly and questioningly at Sir Charles. The latter continues:

"Yes, Mr. Smith. You may attribute it to the shock my nervous system has received, or what you will, but I am determined to be a new man with the New Year—to turn over a new leaf. I have a nephew somewhere, and my poor sister on her death-bed wrote to tell me all about him. I have her letter now. He was coming to England, she said, and would seek me out—not to ask me to help him, because he wanted help from no man; he had health and strength and talents, and would work for his own living—but simply to present himself to me as her son. She hinted that in mind as in person he resembled his father closely. This, I own, prejudiced me against the lad, and I was glad that he never came to me. To-morrow I will furnish you with every clue I am possessed of—they are but few—and you must do all you can to find him for me. I resolved never to acknowledge him in my lifetime, but in my will I have made him my heir. He cannot be very young now. Ah, you hesitate—you look—— Why, what is the matter? Is it not a case that you would undertake?"

"I would undertake it gladly."

"Right! I must have him. I don't care what he is or what kind of a life he may have been leading. *Find him*, and I will accept him as my own son."

"And you would neither repent nor feel ashamed, Sir Charles, if he were to turn out, say, a detective—like myself?"

"I'd give a thousand pounds this moment to know he was such a man as you!"

Sir Charles speaks vehemently. I press my hands tightly together, scarcely breathing, while I look at the faces of the two men. That of

the elder is fired with the energy displayed in his last sentence; there is a look of determination too about the lines of the mouth which speaks well for the keeping of his word. That of the younger is softening every moment as he meets the old man's gaze. He is struggling to control himself in a way that I alone can understand. Surely, surely it is the most momentous moment of his life! Rising, he stands close in front of the baronet.

"Sir Charles Waresley, your nephew is before you now, for I am he! But, remember, he does not hold you to your word. Uncle!" he exclaims scarcely above his breath, while he holds out both hands, raising his eyes half questioningly, half defiantly, to meet those of the old man. The latter, looking the embodiment of wonder and amazement, starts up, seizes the extended hands in his and grips them warmly. "Good heavens! is it possible?" he cries.

"It is quite true," says Mr. Smith, "and equally impossible for me to deceive you longer. You desired me to find your nephew—I can but produce him in myself. That I am he I have ample testimony with me to prove. You shall see my proofs at once, for I have neither the right nor wish to be believed only on my bare word."

"I will see your proofs—to-morrow. In the meantime you are——"

"John Smith, Detective."

"Ha! Your father's name was Smith—I had forgotten that. It is strange I never once associated your name with his."

"We are too numerous a family, sir," answers the newly found nephew, laughing. "No one ever thinks of our being related to each other—we Smiths."

"Mr. John Smith appears to have two other names, Sir Charles," I say. "Perhaps he will explain what the C. W. stands for?"

"Charles Waresley," he answers promptly.

As I had guessed.

Mr. Smith insists on producing the proofs of his identity at once, which I need only say are incontestable; and uncle and nephew are shortly on the closest terms of kinship and cordiality. That my presence may in no way interfere with their amicable communications I have removed my seat and my book to a remote corner of the room and it is almost dark when I start up suddenly with the knowledge that Mr. Smith is standing close beside me.

"Miss Dalton, will you come with me and——look at the new moon?"

He asks this seemingly irrelevant question with the greatest gravity imaginable, but Sir Charles's laugh makes my face grow red as I glance from one to the other.

"Go, my dear, go," says the master encouragingly. "My nephew is king here. Whatever he asks, neither you nor I must say him nay. Remember that!"

Mechanically I obey. Mr. Smith is already holding open the door.

"It is 'lucky' to look at the new moon at the New Year," he whispers, then leads the way across the hall, and taking up a warm wrap lying there, he puts it round me. The next moment we stand outside, and I am staring up into the star-spangled sky.

"There is the moon," he says; "two days old." And following with my eyes the direction in which he points I see the slenderest of silvery crescents, and say laughingly:

"I suppose we ought to wish a wish and turn our money. I don't know what to wish, and I have no money."

"But I can supply the money and wish too," he whispers eagerly. "Shall I do it for us both?"

"Yes. If you like."

But as I say these words, quite suddenly I repent; for, in a moment, he has caught one of my hands in his.

"Mr. Smith!" I say, indignantly.

"Ah, I know you do not like the name. But, am I only Mr. Smith to you? I will drop it and be Charles Waresley from this hour, provided that you will share it with me."

"But this is all so sudden. I scarcely know you ——"

"I have known you long enough to love you, Amy; and to feel that no other woman in the world will ever be to me what you are."

"You may think this, but ——"

"I took a fancy to you even the first time we met. I would not allow my mind to dwell upon it while I had nothing but my love to offer you, for it is impossible to live on that alone. Hitherto I have had to earn my bread by work ——"

"I too have had to work," I say involuntarily. And this thought somehow seems to draw me nearer to him.

"And I have loved my work right well," he adds with firmness, "but all that is changed. Now I am my own master and my uncle's heir. Miss Dalton—Amy—I am a determined man! I have turned my money and wished a wish for both of us with your consent, so now I tell you this: so sure as yon new moon is shining in the sky, before this year is ended you will be—my wife."

That night I give him no decided answer. But time, since then, has passed swiftly, and to-morrow his prophecy will be fulfilled.

He is standing by me while I write these last few lines. And he whispers in my ear:

"Dear Amy! All this has happened through an old man's dream!'

CHRISTMAS IN A CARAVAN.

By C. J. Langston.

THE idea that ever I should possess a house upon wheels never entered my imagination; and that I should spend one of the happiest Christmas Days in it seemed still more improbable. And yet here am I, on this my twenty-fifth birthday, whilst the Advent bells are shouting through the shutters the best of good news, ready to narrate, with a bumper of '47 port in my hand, how it all came about.

I was down on my luck. My father, a gentleman-farmer, had given me a good education, "among the nobs," as he prided himself, at Rugby. Latin and Greek were more familiar to me than my mother tongue, French I knew by sight, and German from hearsay on the Margate sands. I could hunt, shoot, box, and play cricket with any fellow of my form. In fact, I could do anything but the one thing needful—that is, get my own living. But where was the necessity for that?

The curriculum at Rugby completed, I entered another curriculum at Shrub Hill Station, Worcester, where my father and sisters welcomed me with delight; and we drove, with a fresh tiger in a brand-new livery, to —— Manor Farm, some three miles west of the faithful city.

That was in 1872, when Plutus or Midas, or some of those fellows, rocked the cradle of Agriculture, and there was no cry except from repletion. The hops newly planted throve vigorously; pasture and arable vied in their abundance; the cattle multiplied until the gambols of the lambkins made one dizzy; and the stream of Pactolus seemed to murmur, "I flow on for ever."

Ah, me! the strange reversal came all too soon. Blight blackened the hops. "An adventitious source of income," said my father cheerfully; yet tiger's buttons flew off, and he reappeared in sober corduroy as "man-of-all-work!" Disease decimated the cattle. "Things at the worst are sure to mend," chirped the owner, whilst exchanging our chariot for a gig, because "it runs lighter on the road." Then followed three sunless seasons, drench and drought alternating, and the parental purse was as light as the parental heart. My sisters obtained situations; my venerable father divided his perplexities with a young lady of twenty-three. The delicate allusions of mamma number two to the fine climate of the Antipodes, and the appearance of a double perambulator in the hall, at length reminded me that I was "de trop."

What could I do? Rugby to the rescue. Every avenue to clerkships and starvation in broadcloth was thronged with applicants.

Intimate friends exclaimed "Emigrate! Van Diemen's Land is the place for you." I was willing. My fond father, rocking the new arrivals to rest, was willing also. He borrowed thirty pounds from a neighbour. "There, Dick," said he, handing me the money in the spirit of Artemus Ward, "bless you, my lad. Good-bye! good-bye! Don't be returned like a bad halfpenny." His wife pressed upon me six white handkerchiefs against influenza. The scene was touching. All was in readiness. The anchor of destiny was lifted. Another week and I should have been off: when, lo! a circumstance happened which caused my temporary home to be not on the ocean wave, but still within the compass of the wooden walls of Old England, in the more prosaic shape of a yellow caravan.

I went to Birmingham to take leave of one of the sweetest girls in the world. I am not usually sentimental; besides, people would only laugh at me were I to describe the fair maiden of nineteen summers whom I shall call "Lassie." "Think what a good wife should be, and she was *that*," says the old epitaph. Think what a blue-eyed angel would be in a polonaise and Dolly Varden hat, with flaxen hair floating down her shoulders, and a voice that would charm a bumble-bee and civilize a Boer. To leave that precious gem among Brummagem jewellery was purgatory to me.

Now, it so happened that in passing through the Bull Ring I noticed near St. Martin's Churchyard a large, dusky yellow caravan, with the following concise inscription stuck over the door:

"This Wan to be Soled immedate. Aply within."

Happy thought! I would turn showman for the nonce, and this should be the mansion of my adorable. Love, methought, in such close quarters as a lucky box upon wheels would be a perpetual movable feast. One never dreamt of Dickens's antithesis, "Aggrawashun in a cart is aggrawashun."

Before I could mount the short steps leading to the mahogany door with two brass knockers, a gentleman with a wooden leg and a short pipe jerked it back, and stared at me with some suspicion.

"What will you take for your caravan?" said I, looking extremely amiable.

"Take for my *wan*," echoed Timbertoe, contemptuously. "Air you likely to buy it?" A few minutes' conversation convinced my querist that I was in earnest; and after bidding, Dutch auction fashion, backwards, I secured the van for one-third of the original cost, after certain workmen had certified the article to be in sound condition. We then adjourned to the neighbouring "Black Horse" to confirm the bargain, and my companion became communicative over whiskey toddy.

"'Taint no good showing alone. You must tag yourself to some big circus or 'nagerie, and pick up the coppers. I've drummed for a 'ole evening, and my missus has got stiff jumping in bangles and

askin' folks to walk up; but jest ye get alongside some speckled hosses, or wild beasts, and there's a crowd at wunse, and the chaps that can't afford a tanner won't stand at a penny, 'tickly when their young wimmin is with 'em."

I thanked the man for his advice, and hurried onwards to a prim villa at Edgbaston; where my inamorata and her father lived—the latter a retired silversmith with plenty of money.

"Dick," said the old gentleman, who liked me well, "you are going abroad; here's fifty pounds for you to make a start with. Don't ask me for Lassie until you have trebled it by hard work; then we will talk the matter over. But I fear, Master Dick," added he jocosely, "you'll let her die an old maid."

"May I see her?"

"Oh, by all means; she is in the greenhouse."

Lassie was terribly grieved at the thought of parting. She had no mother to confide in; but a thoroughly fidgety, kind-hearted, short-tempered, good-natured maiden aunt Maria received her secrets.

Seeing Lassie's emotion, I took advantage, when the tear was in the eye, to urge immediate flight and marriage.

For five minutes it was utterly impossible; for another five minutes she did not see how it could be done; and during a further five minutes she would like to know how I thought of managing the affair.

"First," said she, "there is my father; he will never forgive me!"

After showing that her father's anger was never known to last longer than a quarter of an hour, I reasonably concluded that to be angry with the being he most loved for more than a week was not to be thought of.

"Then there is Aunt Maria!"

The idea of Aunt Maria's thunderbolts made us laugh. "Besides, you have no home to take me to," concluded Lassie.

"That is just what I *have*, dearest girl," said I, removing some little tremor of the lips with the pressure of my own: "a delightful home; high and dry, bright, airy, cosey. Venetian blinds, front and back door, and all that kind of thing."

But I could not bear to deceive my darling, and I told her all about my rather striking arrangements. To my surprise she entered cordially into them, winding up with "We must tell Aunt Maria."

At first that lady's temper bounded to the north; cold, biting, gloomy; until a few tears from Lassie caused it to veer to the balmy west, and all was goodwill. The fact that we had honoured her with our confidence, and the remembrance of certain withered letters in her own escritoire, may have had something to do with it. It was settled that Lassie should visit a schoolfellow in Bath, where I would stay at a boarding-house during the publication of the banns, after which we were to be married in the Abbey Church. Our respective parents were still to think that I had gone abroad, and the letters of Lassie would favour the harmless deception originating from love.

I will not bore you with our preparations. Six weeks afterwards we began our experiences in the small town of Bakewell, in Derbyshire, famous for its puddings. A caravan, nine feet by fourteen, resplendent in yellow and green; two tough cart horses; three dancing dogs and a tom cat: intelligent animals, long before trained at home, and somehow disappearing therefrom under cover of my adieus; these formed our creature comforts. Being attached for a consideration to a fragmentary exhibition of wild beasts known as "Wombwell's Menagerie," considerable sensation was caused by our entry, at the rear of two elephants, three camels, nine huge caravans, and "Walker's Emporium for Gingerbread, patronised by the Queen," with a litter of whirlabouts, shooting-ranges, and knock-em-downs following.

Talk of love and cottage bread; why it is nothing to the ups and downs of love in a caravan: but I determined to breast the tide of adverse circumstances with a brave heart. 'Tis true, I should have to groom horses, polish brass fittings, and scrub deal boards. Well! I must have done this and much more had I gone abroad and harnessed myself to a Yankee farmer, or become an Australian squatter. The fellows who travel two or three thousand miles to do work which they are ashamed to buckle to at home, are fools for their pains. Besides, thought I, abroad I should have been utterly alone; whereas, here am I with a charming bride, a carriage to ride in, and a genteel residence free of rates and taxes. As to feeling ashamed of honest work, the great master of Rugby used to say, "Never be ashamed of anything but sin."

And yet few would have recognised us in our altered state; for whilst I had allowed my beard and moustaches to hide half the face, Lassie was shorn of her luxuriant locks; and, in a trim cap and tiny apron, looked for all the world like an irresistible chambermaid. We felt rather nervous in making a start. Our four-footed friends, Spot, Tim, and Jack, were Scotch terriers, rather like in appearance, but as unlike in disposition as Messrs. Bright, Bradlaugh, and Parnell. Spot was fat, easy tempered, though fond of bark; Tim demonstrative and pugnacious, and Jack, a smooth-speaking, sly little rascal, not really reliable at a pinch. The cat, a diminutive tabby, docile and obedient to order.

Picture us, then, on a dull November afternoon, just ready to begin. A large square of canvas was hoisted in front, representing Newfoundland dogs in tail-coats and frills standing on their hind legs in a row for five o'clock tea; being waited upon by a magnified tabby robed in sky blue, wearing spectacles and a mob cap. My wife's first tattoo on the big drum caused me to roar with laughter; but Richard was himself again immediately afterwards, guiding expectant juveniles up the steps, and seating them on the lockers in the humble auditorium. The performance I need not particularise. The quadrupeds imitated bipeds with marvellous fidelity. They thrummed on miniature instruments, told fortunes, fought duels, feigned death, became circus horses

and riders, and accomplished other feats "never before witnessed in this country," all in twenty minutes. It went off with éclat. Being repeated, positively for the last time, at nine o'clock, we found, on this our Derby Day, that we had increased our fortunes to the amount of thirty shillings.

Lassie and I declared that never had we enjoyed a meal so thoroughly as our hot supper that night. The sausages were seasoned with the remembrance of success, the quartern loaf sweet with the satisfaction of hard, honest work; whilst Bass's bitter—"nectar," as Gladstone says, "fit for the gods"—was quaffed to future achievements, more after the fashion of frolicsome schoolboys than that of a sedate couple who had been married six weeks.

I could not help noticing the gentle influence exercised by my wife over our nomadic neighbours, who seemed also to partake of the feræ naturæ. The attendants of the tigers, elephants, and camels—pale-faced, square-set men from the Yorkshire mines—treated her with a deference and kindness not usual. To please them she repeatedly mounted the broad back of an elephant, and traversed the arena on Old Tom the camel, striving to conceal her fears by the sweetest of smiles. Even old Mrs. Buddicome, the proprietress, called her "my loove;" told her in confidence all her complaints and domestic infelicities, magnified through a powerful glass of brandy-and-water: dwelling especially upon the crowning sorrow that a lady in the troupe, alternately Queen of Sheba and Sister to the Sun, had knocked her elegant tiara into a cocked hat; declaring in oriental metaphor that she would never decorate her brow with a crown that more nearly resembled a saucepan-lid than the badge of royalty.

This intimacy with our neighbours of the menagerie enabled Lassie to carry on the delusion that we were seeking our fortunes in some warm clime, where "every prospect pleases," including that of £ *s. d.* In a letter to Aunt Maria, carefully antedated, she exclaimed: "We have at length arrived at Melbourne," not adding "in Derbyshire," of course, and describing the happy contrast between our surroundings and those at Edgbaston. "I expect you are having at home the usual dreary November fog, with the sulphurous smoke of the town thrown down upon you; whereas in this country we have nothing but sunshine. It is full, too, of strange customs. The ladies next door ride on camels, which carry trunks like the elephants; monkeys disport themselves within ten yards, and we often speak to Chippeway Indians in feathers and war paint; and there is quite a surfeit of cocoanuts and oranges. The air must be balmy, for we daily see Englishmen pass the night under canvas. Oh, Auntie! fancy the night, when many shots are fired in our vicinity, to scare away the lions we suppose, whose majestic roar never fails to startle us about twelve o'clock. Dick is working an Eldorado copper mine up the country, and bids me tell father that he means to treble that fifty pounds in a few months."

These letters to Aunt Maria, with an ever-varying address usually illegible, were duly read to the retired silversmith, who never asked for the envelopes, and whose geographical knowledge was limited. He was usually quieted by the assurance that we were on our way home, whilst a private letter revealed to the fond aunt our actual situation.

Meanwhile we managed to jog along the roadway of life with as few ruts as most people. Friendly with our caravan consorts, nevertheless keeping our own position and counsel, we worked hard. If stationary for a few days, every morning there were the horses to see to, the caravan to be cleaned, the dogs to be exercised, and the commissariat to be thought of; whilst Lassie, dear heart, who had never learnt anything but fancy work at school, serrated her delicate fingers in stitching coarse canvas, mending the animals' toggery, and studying Mrs. Beeton's Cookery Book. We dined like the mediævals, at eleven o'clock; our table, the big drum. "Dogberry's Delight" opened at twelve, a convenient hour for school children, mechanics, and mill-workers. We had to guard against mischief. More than once, when my back was turned, pepper and snuff were sprinkled on the little stage, causing dire confusion. Scraps of meat have been thrown, and there has been a general scrimmage when the dogs were lying motionless after a battle royal. A young heathen at Tideswell patted pussy's back when the cat was scraping the violin, for which he received a pat on *his* back which sent him scudding down six steps.

But the most troublesome customers were children of the inquiring age of twelve, who wanted to know everything, and were never satisfied, and to whom the exploits of our sagacious pets were nothing to what they saw somewhere else. I could have thrashed them, if the birch were not more criminal than the poker. Intoxicated gentlemen seldom troubled us; for, if they ventured to ascend the steps without assistance, they rolled backwards, as helpless as Lord Rolle at the Queen's coronation.

I was really saving money. The performances on the average realised a pound each day; whilst household and other expenses were under three pounds a week. The life upon wheels was healthy, and we were happy, until a cloud passed between us and the sun; a slight sorrow it may be said, but we did not think so. It came in this way.

We were stationed in the large market place at Chesterfield, in the spring of 1880. Jim Ackers, a discharged helper from the adjoining menagerie, who had started with tame mice on his own account, planted his cage close to our steps, obstructing the entrance. He was a surly, ill-favoured fellow, who presumed upon his strength and vindictiveness. He would not budge an inch. I reasoned with him until I became angry. One of our pets, the pugnacious Tim, was at my side; and when I stormed, Tim, realising how matters stood,

barked furiously at the fellow's legs. Ackers declared the dog bit him, but I knew better. In a moment the bully's iron heel had stretched poor Tim moaning and bleeding at my feet: the next I had felled the brute to the ground. But he was strong, and rising, threw himself upon me in his hate.

Then the old boxing days at Rugby came to the rescue. Avoiding his sledge-hammer fists, I again sent him down. Undaunted, though staggering, with head bent forward, he managed this time to close with me. "Now I am in for it," thought I, and involuntarily closed my eyes: when lo! strong arms wrenched us apart: and we were marched off to the police station for disturbing the peace of Her Majesty's subjects.

Luckily for me, a county magistrate, a sporting friend of the late Lord Hastings, who had witnessed the assault, testified to the cruel provocation I had received; and kindly Mr. Reynard, after much hesitation, discharged us with a caution.

Ackers, finding all the menagerie men against him, and unwilling to face the battery of Mrs. Buddicome's tongue, disappeared altogether. I found that benevolent matron on my return administering such infallible consolation to my dear wife as: "No good crying over spilt milk; if Ackers hadn't kicked the dog, maybe the horse would; it's done, therefore don't think no more about it." But we *did* think a deal about it.

As I entered the caravan poor Tim tried hard to rise from a mat near the fire to welcome me, but fell back with a low, melancholy whine that went to my heart. Tabby tempted him to play with the paw, and purred against his side, whilst the other dogs came and looked at their companion, then at us, wondering why he did not get up. I gently carried him to Dr. Volker's surgery. "Better kill him outright," said the kind assistant; "it is all up with him."

There hung the smart jacket, the scarlet cap, the tiny musket: would poor Tim never amuse us more? The thought was agony, for we dearly loved our loving little friends. There was no performance that night, our attention being fixed on the favourite. Surely he was in less pain. And now he turns over and attempts to place his legs at the sides. "Look! he is imitating Captain Dash in the duel," cried Lassie, bending over him; "he *is* better." For a moment I also was deceived. I felt the outstretched limbs, so near the fire and yet so cold. I gently caressed the dear dog, and there was the old friendly wag of the tail in response; yet even as I caressed a tremor passed through the body: the beautiful eyes looked earnestly in my face, as if to say, "a long good-bye, kind master;" and Lassie and I were not ashamed to mingle our tears together over the stiffening body of poor little Tim.

Nine months passed. We had moved to many places, and witnessed strange scenes; and "Dogberry's Delight," though a little on the wane, was still a paying concern. I had deposited 150*l.* in a

Birmingham bank through Aunt Maria, and we were preparing to spend Christmas Day, 1880, in a manner befitting the occasion. Drawn up within the shadow of an old gateway at Warwick, we decided to take our ease from Christmas Eve until the Monday following; and, moreover, to have real Christmas fare. Matters had improved since the previous year, when my wife's plum pudding turned out a mealy substance not unlike Byron's in Italy. Now we had full culinary confidence; and it was pleasant to see Lassie, with sleeves tucked up, rolling out the rich paste that was to melt in one's mouth, whilst I was plucking a prime turkey, and practising snapdragon with the chestnuts heating on the stove. The firelight quivered on the sprays of holly pinned to the curtains, and made the bunch of mistletoe dangle so mischievously that I could not resist, and received a cold patty-pan down my back for my pains. In fact, the caravan looked so cosey and cheery that we almost wished that it were Christmas Eve all the year round.

The following morning I attended St. Mary's Church, and after service hurried back to help Lassie in the difficult management of roast and boiled at a solitary stove. But it was all right. We were just sitting down to the banquet, thinking that a turkey was rather a large bird for a small family, when both the brass knockers were exercised violently. An elderly gentleman in a white hat, with a stout lady in sealskin and poke bonnet, were admitted.

"My dear father!" exclaimed Lassie, taking away his breath with a succession of kisses.

"Aunt Maria, by all that's lovely!" echoed I, saluting that ancient damsel under the mistletoe too.

"Ah, Dick, you villain!" gasped the old gentleman, thrusting the fingers of his right hand between my ribs, and making a feint to knock me down with his umbrella, "I've unearthed you at last. Nice warm weather abroad, isn't it?" rubbing his hands.

"Oh!" pleaded Lassie, "I know you will forgive him."

"Forgive him for what?"

"For making me happy, my dearest father."

"And leaving me alone and miserable."

"You could never be lonely or miserable with Aunt Maria," interposed I, gallantly.

Another voice was heard.

"What the dickens, Dick, is *that?*" stepping to a corner of the caravan.

"That, my good sir, is Lassie's Christmas-box; a duplicate of yourself—baby calling for grandpapa."

If any animosity lurked in the old gentleman's heart, our baby-boy dispelled it. Never was such an infant phenomenon shown in a caravan. It was kissed, hugged, and dandled, until our visitors tired with the exertion.

"Ah!" said Aunt Maria, "I watched my opportunity. After

softening your father by mentioning the 150*l.*, he said over the grog last night, 'I can't help thinking of my poor girl roaming in those foreign parts, with only the tigers and sharp-shooters for Christmas company.' 'Should you like to see her at home?' I inquired. 'That I should,' said he. And then I told him everything. And, Lassie, when I saw tears come into your father's eyes, I knew it would be all right."

"Yes," continued her brother, "when I heard where you were, I could not rest until we started; and here we are."

"A capital start, too," said I. "You are just in time for dinner, so sit down at once."

They were delighted. I know not who was the happiest. Even the near-hand chimes forgot to wail "There is no luck about the house;" and we were the cosiest, merriest Christmas party in that ancient borough. Beds were ordered at an hotel for our relatives: but it was past midnight when the old gentleman hurried down our steps in Aunt Maria's poke bonnet, and that discreet lady was seen running along the High Street, and stopped by a policeman for suspiciously carrying a white hat and two umbrellas.

The news of our interesting visitors and their liberal offer of a home for us had gone abroad. The next morning came benevolent Mrs. Buddicome in two odd boots and a flowing robe which had once adorned the ample shoulders of the Sister to the Sun, also to make an offer.

"You knows, my dear looves, the wan 'ud be in my way, and the dogs a noosance; but sooner than such kind creeturs as you should be werrited, I'll take wan, hosses, and all off your hands."

After saying that our pets would remain with us, we produced a bottle of the late Mr. Twamley's fruity port. Mrs. Buddicome was overcome. She wept copiously; kissed us both, called us her "werry own children;" and made such an excellent bargain that it must be a privilege to be disowned by the Buddicome bosom. Later in the day a cab, heavily laden, with a crate of dogs and a cradle on the top, drove to the Warwick station. We entered the train for Birmingham, and when I saw once again the tall tower of St. Mary's rise majestically over the quiet town, pleasant thoughts came unto me about "Christmas in a Caravan."

A DISTANT SKETCHING GROUND.

A LANDSLIP.

IN these times of easy communication, and when such long journeys are undertaken in search of the picturesque, even New Zealand, far away though it be, may not be thought too distant for a visit. The journey takes but six weeks from home; from Liverpool to New York, from thence to San Francisco by the trans-continental railway, and then a three weeks' voyage in the Pacific, calling on the way at Honolulu, ends the voyage.

Once here there is the greatest variety of magnificent scenery for the sketcher, and the atmospheric effects I have never seen equalled in Europe. The air is of a clearness that is marvellous to those who have only been accustomed to the moisture-laden atmosphere of home. Distant mountains seem quite near, as I soon learned to my cost, and shadows are marked with a sharp distinctness that is very different from their vague outline in England. There is something fresh, too, about the primitive modes of travelling and living when up country, that gives a zest to one tired of railways and hotels.

I have lately been up north to Taranaki, and discovered what some of these mountain roads and bush tracks are. One must travel either on horseback or by coach (save the mark), and I, having luggage, chose the latter. I have become acquainted, in my time, at home and abroad, with many queer conveyances, but the match for the New Zealand coach I think I never met. It is large, holding two upon the box besides the driver, and there is room behind, beneath a stiff tarpaulin cover stretched on an iron frame, for nine others, in three rows of three. Occasionally there are one or two perched upon the roof. I became aware of this latter fact one day from being

battered considerably about the head and shoulders by the heels of a gentleman sitting up above, who swung his legs, regardless of consequences, in a pleasingly nonchalant manner. The whole body of the coach is hung upon great springs of leather—steel ones would be useless upon these roads, which are often of the character of an uncleared river bed, and not unfrequently in winter fulfil the function. Travelling thus, except upon the best roads, is an acrobatic performance, for one is for considerably more than half one's time flying in the air; every boulder or tree-stump that one chances across throws you violently from your seat, and one's upward flight is only checked by the iron rods and stiff covering of the conveyance.

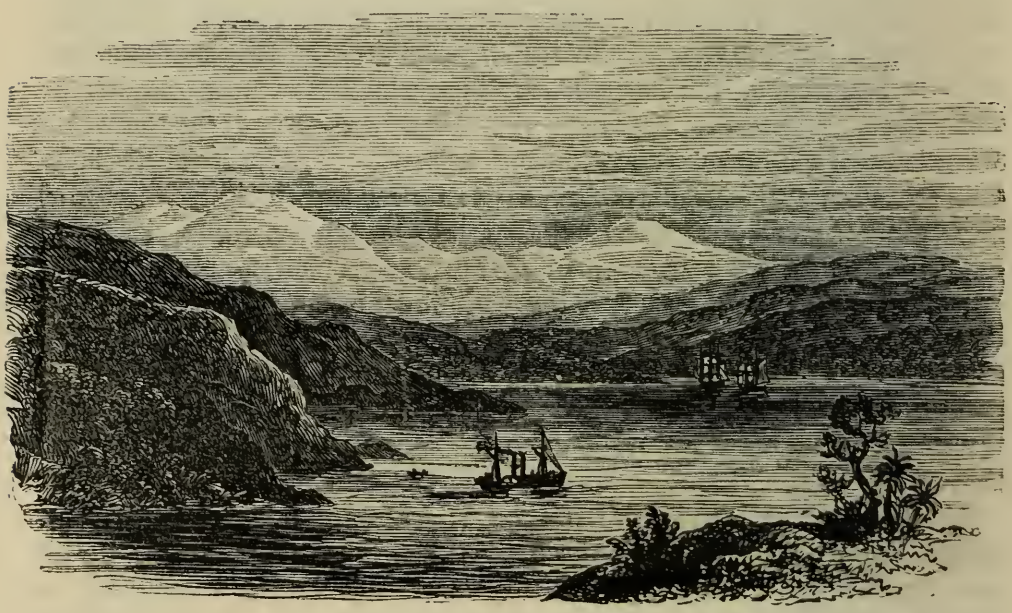
I started one morning from Wellington, whose beautiful harbour is one of the two finest in the world. Shut in on all sides by great hills, and with only a narrow opening at the Heads to the sea, it lies to-day, as I am writing, now in the depth of our winter, lakelike and calm. The end of the harbour, six or seven miles away, where the rich Hutt Valley lies amongst the hills, with the great snowclad Rimutakas behind, is this morning veiled with a soft white haze. Whilst the night is still young with you—for the days are now long at home—the sun has risen here bright and strong, driving the mist before him. From a pale horizon, the sky intensifies to a zenith of deepest blue, and the water, rising with the fast incoming tide, rivals almost the heaven that it reflects. The sea comes to the foot of this green hill, and the soft, sibilant sound of its waves among the stones of the shore is heard up here distinctly. Flocks of white sea-birds fly below, and their shrill cries, as they quarrel noisily over some prize thrown up by the tide, rise clearly from the beach.

From Wellington over the rugged Rimutakas I travelled to Masterton, one of the hideous little towns that are fast springing up all over the colony. I stayed there long enough to visit a Maori pah, or village, which lies some little way from the town. The elaborate carving and rude colouring of their buildings has a very rich effect, and the uncultivated taste of these savages is infinitely to be preferred to much that is here styled art by many of their so-called superiors.

The drive next day was one of the wildest and weirdest I have ever had. It lay through the Seventy Mile Bush, great trees on either side almost shutting out the sky, between whose trunks grow vistas of the loveliest ferns. No words can tell the beauty of these kingly plants as they lift their feathery crowns thirty feet into the hot and motionless air. There is one of excessive beauty, whose dark fronds, with underside of silver-grey, are often nine feet long, which, as an occasional breeze ruffles their stately calm, flash in the sunlight from green to silver and from silver back to green with an effect as beautiful as magic. The whole ground is often carpeted with ferns; climbing ferns creep up the trees; ferns grow everywhere, for in this favoured country there are a hundred-and-fifty species.

It soon grew dark, for we had started late, and then the bush became indeed majestic. Light wreaths of mist rose ghost-like among the trees, from the frequent streams and marshy places. The stars came out, at first singly, and then in troops together, blazing here with a lustrous brilliancy unknown at home.

That night we stopped at Eketahuna, a little clearing in the midst of this great wilderness, and next morning the stars were still undimmed in the sky as we left. With the first faint flush of morning the forest life awoke and the bush became alive with the voices of multitudes of birds, many of which never sing but at dawn. Several rivers had to be forded, and one we crossed in a long and slender native canoe, hollowed by fire out of a great tree, which is generally



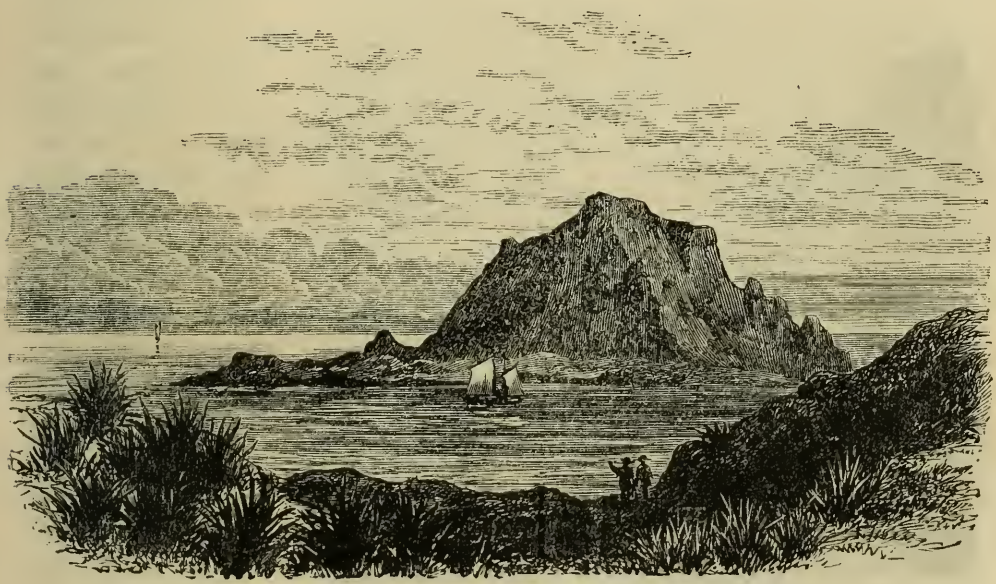
WELLINGTON HARBOUR.

the Totara. A quaintly dressed Maori steered us across, using his one paddle in an admirable way.

The Manawatu Gorge, that I passed through the same day, is justly considered one of the most beautiful scenes in all New Zealand. Imagine a deep valley cut by an impetuous river right through great rocky hills. One side so precipitous that trees can hardly gain a hold, and the other covered from the very water's edge to the heights towering above with the most luxuriant growth. Tree ferns and nekaw palms grow magnificently, and here and there a great tree, covered by the fatal Rata, blazes one mass of scarlet blossom.

We had entered a mile or so into the gorge, when the driver pulled up and poured forth a volley of oaths that was almost poetic in its variety and fervour. The cause of this was a landslip that had, the night before having been rainy, fallen and filled up the road. The coach could not cross over it nor round it, and

could not turn to go back, so here we remained, I taking a little sketch of the slip, until we got help in the shape of four men armed with shovels. The rocks and earth were easily disposed of, simply going over the cliff into the river which rushed below. When the apex of the heap had thus been taken off we thought we might be able to pull the coach over, if it were emptied of its passengers. The horses were taken out, and all we men, with great exertions in pushing and pulling, got the unwieldy thing to the top of the heap. It was a moment of intense excitement, for the outer wheels were sinking in the crumbling earth, and the coach was slowly toppling over towards the verge, when we heard a piercing shriek: "Stop, stop!" We turned and saw our only lady passenger madly scrambling up to us.



ISLAND BAY, WEST COAST.

"Oh, let me get my carpet bag and umbrella." Language followed from our driver that I'll not repeat. "With a will, boys, for by heaven she's over!" With a huge effort, just as she was on the point of falling, we moved her, and, with a rush down the descent, gained the road.

Some days afterwards I was in Taranaki at a miserable little place called Stratford, which is about as unlike the Warwickshire town of that name as any place on earth well could be. There the railway to New Plymouth commences, and as there is only one train a day, which meets the coach, and which we had managed somehow to miss the night before, I determined to walk to Inglewood, my destination, a distance of about ten miles. The road lay through the uncleared bush, and was a succession of the most exquisite "bits;" rapid little rivers dashing themselves against the great rocks and boulders brought down from the volcano in the days of its activity centuries

ago. I had long been hemmed in by the great trees on either side, but coming at last to an opening I looked up and beheld, far rising into the upper blue, what I shall always think most beautiful of mountains, Egmont, glittering pure and white in its great mantle of snow. Rising from almost the sea level, and standing, as it does, by itself, the great cone struck me as being not only the most beautiful, but the grandest mountain I had ever seen. A range of low hills, rather higher than Snowdon, lie at its feet, covered to their summit with the same wild bush that stretches round as far as the eye can see.

WHAURANGA.

I stayed in this neighbourhood, which is a perfect Paradise for the naturalist as well as the artist, for some time. The cold little rivers that rise in the snows of the mountains are generally very beautiful, and the trees that arch over them are covered with the most delicate of filmy ferns and mosses, that hang in graceful festoons from the boughs. There is one fern that clothes the trees in damp places in Taranaki that is particularly lovely; the leaves are almost circular, of a pale green colour, and so translucent that when the sun shines through their delicate texture they glow like emeralds.

My return journey to Wellington was by the same forest road, but there having been heavy rains for two or three days, the track was a perfect Slough of Despond. Our rate of progression was about two miles an hour, which gave me ample opportunity to examine the glorious trees and plants we passed. New Zealand trees are all, as far as I have examined, evergreen. Some few, however, of those introduced, still keep faithful to the customs of their native homes, and in the late autumn turn to gold, and their leaves "drift by to

their fading" as of yore. It seems very strange to come across a row, perhaps of poplars, upon some little homestead, glowing in the sunshine against a dark background of unfaded bush.

In one part of the road the mud was so deep that the four powerful horses were quite unable to move the coach. In this place we remained for nearly two hours; every fresh endeavour to make the horses pull ended in the two leaders rolling down a little bank, and lying at the bottom entangled in the harness, and with their legs in the air. There we remained, and might have done so until now, had not timely assistance arrived, again in the shape of spades, only this time they were used to dig us out. A most ignominious spectacle it was to see the Royal Mail thus dug out of a mud hole, and drawn backwards by the horses. New Zealand travelling is diversified and made exciting by such little episodes as this.

Gorge near Kaiwarrawarra.

About two days' travelling from Taranaki brought me to Foxton, a little seaport place on the west coast. Here I stayed one night and left for Wellington next morning, long before dawn. There being no road made, the coach travels along the sea-shore for about thirty or forty miles, before it turns inland. For miles and miles we drove, with the water surging about our wheels. The morning was a perfect one, and the sun rose gloriously, turning the dull sand-hills into gold, and the wet beach shone in the sunlight like a shield of burnished silver. Great rollers came in grandly, flashing every tint of sapphire and emerald as they curled slowly over and fell. Very sad looked the wreck of a large vessel which is stranded there, lying deserted and dark against the tender morning sky, with the waves dashing into spray against its great black hull.

Soon after we had left the shore—which is in places entirely composed of beautiful shells—turning inland between the barren hills, we began the ascent of the Pikakariki Range ("Hills of the little Green Parrot"). Here everyone had to walk, the ascent being very steep. The road is upon the seaward face of the range. Upon the exposed parts of the hills very few trees can grow, such is the force of the wind. The hardy shrubs that can exist there all turn their backs to the sea, and stretch out their stunted branches landwards. Very different is the aspect of the deep gullies that are sheltered from the blast, for there vegetation, almost tropical in appearance, grows luxuriantly.

The view from the summit, where we had to rest and wait for the

MOUNT EGMONT, IN TARANAKI.

coach, slowly toiling after us, was grand in the extreme. Below was the sea, lying blue in the light of the afternoon sun, and looking, from the height we were above it, calm and waveless. Two or three islets lie some little distance from the shore, and on the extreme horizon the snow-clad summits of the mountains in the southern island just gleamed white above the sea. The afternoon was hot, and as my fellow-passenger was a beautifully tattoed Maori, who could speak no word of English, I could sit upon the short, sweet turf, and glory in the beauty of the scene without any vulgar interruptions.

The range descended, three or four hours more brought us again to the lights and noise of Wellington.

ALFRED ST. JOHNSTON.

STRIKING MIDNIGHT.

By F. E. M. Notley, Author of "Olive Varcoe," etc.

I.

THERE was a great pile of Christmas evergreens lying on the table in the servants' hall, and I, standing by the huge fire on the hearth, dropped laurel-leaves one by one into the flame, and watched them shrink and shrivel up writhingly, with a sharp crack like a mimic explosion; and I waited eagerly with childish pleasure for this sound, but started back with sudden nervousness when it came.

"What be glazing 'pon tha fire for, Maester Gerald?" asked our boy, Zeke Trehaverne.

"I am *thinking*, Zeke," said I, with all the superiority of a boy who can read when speaking to one whose ignorance of letters is supreme.

"Thinking," answered Zeke reflectively, "then I wouldn't glaze like a dying conger; nor yet burn Christmas when I was thinking, ef I wes you, Maester Gerald; et's oogly and onloocky, et es."

My small hand, stretched over the fire with a bright branch of laurestinus, drew itself back as I turned to "glaze" earnestly upon Zeke, and I took care not to burn the laurestinus.

"Aw, my dear," said Zeke, shaking his head, "et's a black Christmas we should have, Maester Gerald, ef I hadn't hendered you burning thicky there spreg."

"What's a black Christmas, Zeke?" said I, in a tone of fright.

"A Christmas weth mourning, and a churchyard en et," said the malicious Zeke, who seemed to be enjoying himself amazingly, as he watched me with grey-green eyes gleaming with fun.

I dropped the sprig of laurestinus, all wan and drooping now, and turned a pale face towards Zeke, but that cruel young child-eater had his back turned towards me, and his wicked shoulders were shaking convulsively.

I clasped my little hands tightly and began to think harder than ever. Now a giant loomed out black and greedy, and I turned cold as I almost felt his cruel grip upon my shoulder; then a pixy danced upon the lawn, and whispered to me of untold treasures lying in one of the grim shafts upon the moor, and in fancy I got down to its very loneliest depths; but there, visible by a red light in the darkness, I met Zeke's most horrible ghost, that dreadful spirit who lived all alone in a haunted house, and at dead of night knocked at its neighbours' doors to borrow washing-tubs in which to wash its murdered victims' clothes. It was in vain to tell Zeke I didn't believe a ghost would borrow washing-tubs, or could carry them off if they were lent. Zeke had seen it. Zeke's mother's sister by marriage had answered

the ghost out of window and told it to come again to-morrow, because the "tubs wus full of linen, now, they wus," and the ghost had gone away groaning and wringing its red hands. And Zeke's cousin, Madge Treloar, had lent her washing-tray, she had, and found it at her door again in the morning, empty, but stained with blood.

"Maester Gerald," said Zeke, bursting in upon my visions with an unctuous voice, "ef thee glazes any more upon me like that, I shall taake thee for a raal conger cheal-vean, and I shall cut thee oop, and put thee in a pie for sartain. My pianer es out of tune. Come along weth me. I'm going to get something from tha cook to shaape un fitty weth."

So saying he took me by the hand, and trailing my small legs after him at a good speed, we soon reached the kitchen.

"Cook, where's the leg-o'-mutton bones you promised me?" asked Zeke.

Now this question was by no means a singular one, for Zeke was an eccentric genius of the musical order, and made wondrous melody with his bones, being in that respect an Ethiopian of an older date than the originals themselves.

"Drat tha boy," said the cook. "Doant e know et's Chrestmas Eve, and I've tummals of work to do?"

"I do know et," answers Zeke; "and aren't tha curl singers coming? and the giz-dancers will be to door at eight o'clock; and ef so be as you waint give me tha boanes to waunce, my pianer waint be ready, and I shaint be able to play a dance tune fitty for um."

This last argument was conclusive. The cook, who was peeling apples, threw down her knife and fetched the bones, which she bestowed upon Zeke with sufficient good-humour. The fact was, mistress cook shared the enthusiasm of the rest of the household for Zeke's music, and enjoyed more than the others the astonishment with which his performance on the bones was greeted by strangers. Zeke's instrument was made in this wise: lengthways inside a tall cupboard door in the servants' hall he had arranged a cunning contrivance of bones and wires of different thickness, on which he played with two little padded sticks, dulcimer fashion.

On the appearance of a stranger his great delight was to hide himself in this cupboard, and just as the individual had seated himself comfortably, strike up some well-known Cornish tune, while two little gimlet-holes bored for the purpose enabled Zeke to witness the bewilderment and mystification of his listener; and when he was sufficiently "mazed, betwattled, and dwaled," Zeke finished his tune and stalked from the cupboard in an innocent and unmusical manner, with some noteless plate or glass in his hand, which he laid on the table with a look of perfect unconsciousness—a proceeding which sufficed wonderfully to increase the reputation of our mansion for ghostly noises of all kinds, from muffled drums and a death march in the dining-room, down to an unearthly and pixy jig in the kitchen.

Walking back to the servants' hall, I watched with great interest the process of removing the broken and ill-sounding bones, and replacing them with good ones.

"Zeke," said I when this was satisfactorily concluded, "I have never heard it strike twelve in my life, and mamma says I may sit up to-night and *see* it on the clock."

Zeke slily ruffled his hair, and turned upon me a head like a porcupine's quills surmounting a countenance of extreme terror.

"You don't mean to say," observed Zeke, "that missus is going to let a young cheel—a *little* cheel like you see anything so offul as that?"

"Is it so very awful, Zeke, to hear midnight strike? What happens?"

"Fust tha fires burn blue," said Zeke, "then the caandles does the same and goes out, buch-a-boos look in et the winders for oogliness, murderers walk, and ghosts rise screeching."

"Did you ever see all that, Zeke?"

"Many's tha time, Maester Gerald, but I'm pooty well used to it now. Tha fust time I sat oop till midnight I was skeered ento fits, and my hair stood a hend for a fortnight—our cook said 'tweer for oogliness, but it wann't—and she rubbed it down smooth weth a pound of caandles and a pot of laard. Et tuk tha whole pound to lay et flat, Maester Gerald."

Now all the time Zeke had been talking, his fingers were busy embellishing the hâll with evergreens, while I, equally zealous, had handed him the branches, or helped tie them together with twine.

A burst of melody, aided by the deep grunt of the bassoon, interrupted us.

"Holloa! here's the curl-singers," cried Zeke, springing from the ladder on which he was stationed fastening up his last star of Bethlehem in the middle of a group of laurels—stars, by-the-by, of shining lead, which Zeke had melted down and cast in the stoppers of some very old-fashioned decanters which he had used for moulds.

Carol-singers, the choir from the church, giz-dancers—I believe it should be *guise*-dancers—and servants crowded the hall, all combining to create a noise insupportable to any but country ears. An immense fire, unlimited currant-cake, yellow with saffron, mountains of pies, and jugs of egg-flip, sufficed to make them exceedingly cheerful. Christmas Eve in our house was always given up to the servants and their friends; so amid a rattle of voices, cards, songs, giz-dancing and cheers, I, shy and half-frightened, stole away to find a quieter place.

II.

In the passage I came upon my sister Margaret seated on a mat.

"What are you doing, Maggie?"

"Eating apple pealings and figs," said Maggie contentedly. "Have some?"

What boy says no to anything eatable?

I sat down by Maggie's side and ate out of her lap till all was gone.

"There's plenty more in the kitchen," said Maggie; "mamma, and cook, and Sarah are there making—oh, such nice things!"

"May we go there?" said I.

"Where else are we to stop till twelve o'clock, I wonder?" answered Maggie. "The lights and fires are all out in the drawing-room, the servants are dancing in the hall, and not a soul on this side of the house except papa by himself in the library."

It needed no further argument to make me choose the kitchen, where we found my mother up to her elbows in flour—we were not a fashionable family—the cook chopping some unknown condiments of appetising flavour, and Sarah, the nursemaid, pealing apples. Margaret and I crept under the table, and ensconced ourselves on the high window-seat, against which it rested, from which vantage ground we caught and ate stray raisins, rolling apples, and wandering figs with great assiduity and contentment.

I thought of my father in the lonely library, "away, and away, and away" from this bright feasting side of the house—as far as Lord Bateman's "chamber" was from his castle door. Yes, there he was, as usual, up to his eyes and ears in books, and perfectly unconscious that the fire was going out and the shutters were unclosed. However, in another moment I forgot him when Sarah plunged into a love story ending with a Christmas wedding, where the bride was the "beautifullest" young lady she ever saw, and the "pictur of dear little missy sleeping up in the nursery."

Now, considering all this chattering and chopping, mingled with the melodies, the bassoon and bones coming in gusts from the hall, I look upon it as a remarkable fact that, at this identical instant, we plainly heard the said missy squalling with all her might.

"There's the baby crying!" exclaimed cook.

"Hush!" said my mother; "let us listen."

The cook ceased chopping, and Sarah, with the great kitchen poker in her hand, pointed at the bars, suspended her intended thrust at the huge fire, and listened breathless for the little cry.

There! it rang out again shrill above the bassoon and bones, and perfectly distinct from the male voices that were shouting, "God save you, merry gentlemen."

"Somebody must go up and rock the cradle," observed the mistress of the house.

Ah, yes, somebody! but who was it to be? This was the servants' night, given up to them from time immemorial, and my mother, after surveying her handmaidens for a second or two, turned to Maggie and me, and ordered us to take a candle and "run up and rock baby."

Margaret and I descended from our perch, crept under the table, and hiding our unwillingness, prepared to obey. Very courageously we left the kitchen, though there was a slight shiver of the flesh in obeying the command to "shut the door," and with tolerable nerve we

traversed the long, narrow passage leading to the foot of the back stairs. With my foot on the lowest step I stood trembling, and glanced up the long, dark flight of stairs. The candle flickered dismally, and the cold wind rushed by us like an invisible but palpable thing in the darkness.

Margaret's laughing voice roused me from my shrinking dreams, as she boldly led the way to the top of the flight. In another moment we were in the nursery, but this was scarcely more cheerful than the ghostly staircase. In the middle of the room glimmered a huge and cumbrous contrivance, like a tin lighthouse, which our grandfathers called a night-light. It was barred, and chequered, and pierced with holes, so that its monstrous shadow darkening the walls made the room look like a grated dungeon. In the middle of this machine was a tube filled with water, in which the candle curtseyed up and down like a lank old maid in white. As we shut the door she took a dip too low, and incontinently drowned the light with a hiss and a spit, like a witch dying a watery death.

As we walked chillily through the great room, the white snow gleamed faintly on us through the large shutterless windows, and the feeble cry of the little infant struck painfully on the ear. The fire was gone out, and there was no other light now save our solitary candle.

Margaret placed herself on the window seat, her back, of course, towards the window. I sat immediately opposite, and with the cradle between us we began a succession of vigorous rockings, sufficient to stupefy any baby into giddiness and sleep. As, however, Margaret kept up a running fire of mimicry, in which, with her usual success, she took off every member of the household, and this was answered on my part by explosions of laughter, it was no wonder baby continually awoke and screamed afresh. Seeing this, Margaret at last, in obedience to my expostulations, ceased her "imitations," but commenced instead a series of grimaces, and met my gaze every time I looked her way with a face either so perfectly hideous as to elicit a scream from my irascible nerves, or else so comical that, in spite of my efforts to restrain my laughter, I exploded with a fresh burst, and baby, consequently, with a fresh cry.

This triumph of her powers was too delightful to enable Margaret to listen to reason; so, seeing all argument useless, I kept my gaze steadily fixed on the window, and refused to be tempted to turn my eyes for an instant from the bleak darkness without.

Deprived of an audience, Margaret, like all other artists, lost her *verve*, and her spirits flagged. Gradually we sank into a deep silence, broken only by the monotonous rocking which we continued perseveringly to keep up. I was giving way to a creeping chilliness and inclination to sleep, when a sudden change in the light of the room roused me into an examination of the candle. It was burning what is technically called "blue," and the long snuff clogging the wick made the flame flicker unsteadily. Margaret was nearly asleep. I stretched

my arm across the cradle to awaken her, and pointing to the candle, motioned to her to use the snuffers, the candlestick being placed on the window-seat by her side.

Just at this moment the clock in the stable-turret began to strike twelve, and as the first reverberation of the deep bell echoed sadly through the room, I, in my old way, turned my eyes again to the window, and in that instant my blood seemed to freeze with horror. A man's face was close to the glass! He was looking, not at us, but at something beyond us, and his white distorted face was full of an unutterable horror suggestive of some unseen power holding him under the influence of its hideous terror. This *fear*, written in ghastly lividness on his repulsive features, was awful to witness, making the heart shrink and the blood stand still.

I marked it all for a moment only, for in the next he knew that I saw him, and as his expression changed instantaneously, not to one less ferocious or threatening, but to something more human, he passed his right hand towards his left arm, and the light flashed on something that gleamed as he raised it.

For one instant, for the twinkling of an eye, I saw the upraised flashing weapon, the cruel hideous face beneath it: the next we were plunged in total darkness—the candle had gone out.

It was a relief, for the darkness released me from the fascination of terror that had forced me to meet that man's gaze. I shut my eyes involuntarily. When I opened them again he was gone. There was nothing visible at the window save the dark branches of the evergreens waving dimly, and the faint glisten of the snow, without which the darkness would have been black in its intensity.

I leant forward towards Margaret, and whispered in a voice unlike my own—

"Maggie, the very wickedest man in the world wouldn't hurt a baby, would he?"

"To be sure not!" said Margaret, astonished.

"Come away, then," I exclaimed softly; "come away!" and I seized her hand.

As we felt our way on in the dark my hair seemed still to stand on end and my blood to be turned cold within me. We reached the door just as the last stroke of twelve from the slow-sounding turret-clock vibrated through the room. By aid of the bannister we traversed the staircase swiftly in spite of the pitch darkness. At the foot a man's hand seized me, and I fell to the ground like one dead.

"My dear children," said my father's voice, "don't be frightened. I heard you coming, so waited till you came down, as I was afraid you would run up against me, or, rather, against the lamp I am carrying."

I had lost all power to speak, but Maggie answered:

"What, papa, your lamp gone out too? Just like our candle! How odd!"

Gropingly we traversed the unlighted passage, and then a burst of laughter, a stamp of merry feet, and a tremendous rattle on the bones greeted us through the half-open door of the hall. Another moment and we were in the light, warm kitchen, bright with evergreens and berries glowing in the blaze of the great fire.

I sank into a chair unheeded, and, hiding my little white face from the light, I fell into a sort of dream. I could not tell what I had seen. I felt as though the man himself prevented me from telling—as though, with all the strength of his cruel, fierce will, he was binding mine into an inert feebleness which assured my silence.

I felt sure Maggie would be the first to laugh and declare the vision at the window was only one of my fancies. She had seen nothing, and her clear, sharp, practical sense bore with it a weight of testimony to which my warm imaginative nature could not pretend. Dreaming on, I heard her tell in her funniest way how the candle had burnt blue, just as if "a ghost were in the room," and how in another instant it had gone out, only, she believed, because she made a face as she was going to snuff it. Then the cook's voice broke on my ear, saying:

"Here's plenty of oil, sir, and nothing the matter with the wick. I can't tell how the lamp came for to go out!"

"I think you are mistaken," answered my father; "there must be something wrong, for it went out without a moment's warning. I was reading quietly, when I fancied I heard a step on the gravel, and looked towards the window to see what it was; but I had only just time to remark that the shutters were unclosed, when out went my lamp, and I was left in total darkness."

"You had the firelight?" said my mother.

"My dear, when a person is reading ——" began my father.

"He lets the fire out, of course! Just like you. Why did you not ring to have it attended to?"

"My dear," said my father, in the cheerful clear voice that now, in middle age, still vibrates kindly on my ear across the gulfs of death and time: "I remembered it was Christmas Eve, and all the servants were either busy or enjoying themselves, so I accepted the punishment of my carelessness—I sat in the cold. But when the lamp went out I felt a curious nervousness, a strange impulse impelling me to leave the room. I had a fancy I can't account for, that something terrible would happen if I stayed there!"

"Well," observed my mother, looking up from her trifle-dish with a merry glance, "you set us a brave example of courage, I must say!"

My father smiled and went on.

"I was reading an interesting work on the brain," he said, "and had just come to a chapter on the feelings or warnings of the instinct, which the writer declared were continually neglected, though often danger and even death were the result of leaving this secret voice unheeded; and he related many curious anecdotes in proof of this, showing how the brain, half-awakened to danger, spoke to us in

dreams, presentiments, or sudden and unaccountable resolutions and terrors. Having just read this, I was determined, as far as I was concerned, the author should not have written in vain, so I obeyed my impulse at once, and took up my lamp and departed."

The cook regarded her master with open-eyed terror.

"I wouldn't read no such book, sir, if I wes you," she said. "There's books, so I've heered tell, that raise spirits, and brings *h*omens round a house, and thic's waun of 'em, I reckon. I was down to Aun' Nancy's at the lodge this murnin' to taake her down a caake, and I streeve hard to maake her come up to-night with aal the rest of 'em. But she wedn't hire of it—she wedn't. She'd had a token, she said, that her sperrit was caaled away. A little bird had flyed ento her room every evening this week paast. Would you caal thic a *h*omen or a warning, sir?" asked cook, in conclusion.

My father always listened as kindly to servants as he did to children, but I expected, in answer, to hear poor Aunt Nancy's superstition rebuked. I was surprised, then, when he replied softly that doubtless by some mysterious presentiment the poor old woman knew her end to be approaching, or she would not so firmly have expressed her conviction that such was the fact.

What were they all saying now? I could not tell, I only heard my father's words:

"I assure you, my dear, I heard footsteps on the gravel. The villagers—the singers would not come to the front of the house—that's nonsense. I'll send some of the servants round to see—or stay, as they are all so happy, I will not disturb them; I'll go myself, and take only Zeke."

These words unlocked my tongue. I sprang forward, and clinging to my father's arm, implored him not to go. But the power to utter what I had seen seemed still denied me. My faculties were numbed by the conflicting waves of terror, shame, doubt, indecision, that swept rapidly over my brain, and, above all, a nameless, undefinable dread withheld me. I still saw that hideous face, and the uplifted weapon threatening me with death if I spoke.

My father, my mother—all now remarked my paleness, my agitation, and crowding around me with kind words and caresses the cold oppression at my heart gave way, and I found relief in a passionate burst of tears.

They put it down to the score of my having stayed up too late, and I, exhausted and convulsed with sobs, was in no state to combat the general opinion. Still I was able to wring a faithful promise from my father that he would not leave the house, before, half-choked with hot negus, stifled with kisses, and my pockets crammed with sweetmeats, I was half led, half carried up to bed, Sarah promising to stop with me.

III.

THE next morning—the happy Christmas morning to which I had looked forward so long—I was awoke by an eager whispering. I sat up within my white curtains to listen.

"Murdered!" I heard Sarah's voice say. "Good heavens! when?"

"Last night, between eleven and twelve, they think."

I tore back the curtains, and seized Sarah's arm.

"Who is murdered?" I screamed.

"Don't be frightened, Master Gerald," answered Sarah; "it is poor old Aunt Nancy down at the lodge. She was murdered last night, some time or other; but it was not found out till about seven this morning, when our cart wanting to go through the gate, and the man not being able to make her hear, he opened the lodge door, and found her lying dead on the planchen. The doctor, who comed as fast as he could from Kerryer Church-town, says she was hit on the head with a hatchet, or some such thing as that. And poor old Nancy's own hatchet is missing, so for certain that's what the murderer killed her with, and he has taken it away with him, or hid it."

I fell back on my pillow. What was that thing that had gleamed in the light last night as the murderer—I felt sure he was the murderer—had raised it to threaten me? I knew now; it was a hatchet. And where was it to-day? Like a flash of light it seemed to be revealed to me that I knew.

Close by the library—into the window of which the murderer must have looked, on the quiet figure of my father reading—there was a narrow path, dark, partly with the shade of many small trees and shrubs thickly planted, and partly with the shadow of an old and crumbling wall. We children never ran down that path to play, for it led to a deep pit, black and dangerous itself, but rendered more horrible by the legends of superstitious terror in which its history was shrouded. At rare intervals, and only when a servant accompanied us, we had stood on its dark brink, and with cautious step and fearful hand had thrown in the pebbles, whose noise, as they rattled against its unknown sides, or fell at last with a heavy sound into its black waters, curdled our young blood, and drove the colour from our little blanched faces.

It was of this place I thought now as I pressed my hands on my burning eyes, to shut out the vision of the hatchet, that appeared to me lying in silence and darkness at the bottom of the gloomy pit.

I might have told now of the man I had seen at the window; but as I lay pale and trembling, gathering force to speak, Sarah began eagerly to relate how the poor old woman had been found with the bread-knife in her hand, the loaf lying at her feet. All the blows were on the back of her head. The murderer had struck her treacherously while she was cutting him the bread his poverty or his hunger demanded of her.

"And so everyone thinks," continued Sarah, "'tis thic trapesing vagabon', Phil Thorn, has done it. He was alwis going to her for the bread and butter he was too lazy to earn for hisself, and she never sent 'un away empty. She has often got up in the middle of the night to cut it off for 'un, tha glassenbury dog! However, there's waun comfort—tha villain ain't goet nothing by his deed; for though he paertly rifled tha house, ha missed her little hoard of savings, ha ded. And even ef he'd found 'em they was little enough to commit murder for—to kill a poor, dear, kind old soul like Aun' Nancy, weth no more strength in her than a tomtit," concluded Sarah with a burst of tears.

During the few days that elapsed before this stranger and tramp (Phil Thorn) was discovered and lodged in prison, my secret weighed heavily on my heart, and my dread of him was so great that I could not bear to be left alone, or to lose sight of my father and mother for a moment. His vengeance, I thought, would fall, not on me, but on them. "*Tell*," I could hear him whisper, "and I'll kill them both!" And to my imaginative mind, fanciful and superstitious, it appeared likely that some demon helped him, and would carry the tale to his ears, if I dared to confess that I had seen him.

When I heard he was in gaol I breathed more freely. I played again, or I climbed my favourite fir-tree for a safer solitude than the grounds could give me, and hid among its dark-green foliage with my beloved books.

But then came the dreadful news that Phil Thorn was discharged; there was not sufficient evidence for his committal, and the missing hatchet could nowhere be found. I was terror-stricken. In every gust of wind that moaned and lingered dismally in our old ghostly house, in every creaking stair or jarring door, I heard the murderer's step or voice and felt his presence. In every passing shadow, in every time-worn portrait on the walls, I saw his frightful face glaring down on me with fierce and threatening hate.

I could not have borne this long; but in February, when our western sun was shining warmly upon banks of primroses and violets, we heard that Phil Thorn was gone over the sea.

As the distance lengthened between us and the escaped assassin, so did my tranquillity return. Perhaps he ceased to bear always in his brain the image of the little child who had seen him ghastly from his deed, with the betraying weapon in his hand; and as I faded from his brain so did he from mine, and the wonderful power and sympathy that links brain to brain ceased to magnetise or paralyse me into terror and silence.

He had won the victory. In the silence of his cell, in the noise of the crowded court, all his thoughts must have been concentrated on the little child who held his life in his hand. All the force of his desire, his passion, his will, must have been united in the wish to keep me silent. And in all the torture, the anguish, the fear, beneath which I writhed I had not spoken.

He was safe now across the sea, his name, his identity lost, and his wicked brain relaxed the tight fibres of thought that bound my image to him with murderous desires of revenge and hate. He flung me off from him, and I grew happy and tranquil.

Gradually the hot steam of that cruel murder was lost in the sheen of the summer sky. The fair fresh leaves that shook fragrant in the breeze, and the flowers that starred the earth, covered poor Nancy's blood, and she was forgotten.

IV.

YEARS passed away. We left Cornwall, and I was a great boy, nearly fifteen, when, riding out one day with a brother a year or two younger than myself, my pony lost a shoe. We stopped at the first village to have it replaced, and in the little parlour of the inn I took up an old paper to beguile the time. I was interested when I found it was a Cornish journal, and I went on reading though it was dated some months back. But what was my surprise when, turning the page, I saw a long account of Phil Thorn's second arrest, his committal this time, his trial and subsequent acquittal!

He had enlisted under a false name, had gone to one of the colonies, and after some years' service had been invalided home. On board ship, during the voyage, he was seized with fever, and in his delirium raved of a murdered woman—murdered treacherously while she was charitably cutting bread for him. With gasping breath he told how he had come softly behind her, and struck her down with her own hatchet, which he had found on the table; then with mad laughs and curses he spoke of his hurried search for her money, his disappointment, and flight. In shuddering terror he screamed that her spirit was haunting him, and he pointed with shaking finger to where she stood by his bed, silent but accusing. On the night of the murder, he said, she followed him everywhere. No sooner had he struck her down than she stood upright by his side, and it was the horror of her presence that hindered him from finding the little hoard for which he had killed her. In his wild flight she accompanied him, standing over him in the woods where he lurked, or beckoning to him from lighted windows of houses round which he hovered.

On the arrival of the ship in port the horrified listeners gave him into custody. In gaol he recovered, and in the hardness of renewed health denied the raving of his fever.

On his trial there was little evidence could be brought against him, and these delirious wanderings counted for nothing. The murderer was again at large.

I rode home hastily, and related to my father the strange vision I had seen at the window on that Christmas Eve—the night of the murder.

He questioned me closely, and discovering I could not venture to swear that the gleaming weapon held in the man's hand was a hatchet,

and deeming it most improbable that at this distance of time I could identify the horrible face of that night with the bronzed and changed features of the soldier Phil Thorn, he judged it best to let things rest as they were.

And to this day the murder remains unpunished; but I, thinking of it, often wonder if the silence of a child saved the murderer, and I ask myself by what power I was numbed and tongue-tied. And who can account by any philosophy for the sudden extinguishing of the lights in both rooms, as the assassin's face touched the glass? Did this circumstance hinder the commission of a succession of crimes, by interposing a providential darkness between our lives and his desperate hand?

I cannot tell. There are mysteries abroad and around us everywhere, which the deepest efforts of human thought have not yet answered.

Sometimes a vision of the hatchet, rusty with the blood of the only human being that was kind to the wanderer Phil Thorn, floats before me, unfound, unthought of, lying at the bottom of the old gloomy well.

Is it there?

I believe so, but neither time nor chance in this world will ever tell.

GOD BLESS THE SHIPS.

A VIGNETTE.

THRO' the crossed bracken boughs,
  Green, brown, and golden;
Between the frowning brows
  Of two cliffs, holden
In Nature's picture frame
  Where the land dips—
Across the sunset flame
  Sail the good ships!

Outward, or homeward bound,
  Free or deep-laded:
Like ghosts without a sound
  When the West's faded,
Cleaving the moonshine track
  Where the white strips
Bar the dark waters back—
  God save the ships!

Sad eyes are straining
  To catch the sails' flutter;
Salt tears are raining
  What voice dare not utter.
Bound far to distant lands,
  As the rope slips,
Bent heads and clasping hands
  Pray for the ships!

Home, with the eveningtide,
  Colours free blowing,
Quick by fond eyes descried,
  Coming or going:
Still as they cross our sight
  Wakes to our lips
One prayer, by day and night,
  "God bless the ships!"

G. B. STUART.

MRS. CRAMP'S TENANT.

IT was autumn weather, and we had just arrived at Crabb Cot. When you have been away from a familiar place, whether it may be only for days, or whether it may be for weeks or months or years, you are eager on returning to it to learn what has transpired during your absence, concerning friends or enemies, the parish or the public.

Bob Letsom ran in that first evening, and we had him to ourselves; the Squire and Mrs. Todhetley were still in the dining-room. I asked after Coralie Fontaine.

"Oh, Coralie's all right," said he.

"Do the old ladies go on at her still?" cried Tod.

Bob laughed. "I think they've stopped that, finding it hopeless."

When Sir Dace Fontaine died, now eighteen months ago, the two girls, Coralie and Verena, were left alone. Verena shortly went back to the West Indies to marry George Bazalgette, Coralie remained at Oxlip Grange. Upon that, all the old ladies in the place, as Tod had ungallantly put it, beginning with Bob's mother, set on to lecture her: telling her she must not continue to live alone, she must take a companion of mature age. Why must she not live alone, Coralie returned: she had old Ozias to protect her from robbers, and her maid-servants to see to her clothes and her comforts. Because it was not proper, said the old ladies. Coralie laughed at that, and told them not to be afraid; she could take care of herself. And apparently she did. She had learnt to be independent in America; could not be brought to understand English stiffness and English pride: and she would go off to London and elsewhere for a week or two at a time, just as though she had been sixty years of age.

"I have an idea she will not be Coralie Fontaine much longer," continued Letsom.

"Who will she be, then?"

"Coralie Rymer."

"You can't mean that she is going to take up with Ben!"

"Well, I fancy so. Some of us thought they were making up to one another before Sir Dace died—when Ben was attending him. Don't you recollect how much old Fontaine liked Ben?—he'd have had him by his side always. Ben's getting on like a house on fire; has unusual skill in surgery and is wonderful at operations: he performed a very critical one upon old Massoch this summer, and the man is about again as sturdy and impudent as ever."

"Does Ben live down here entirely?"

"He goes up to London between whiles—in pursuit of his studies and the degrees he means to take. He is there now. Oh, he'll get on. You'll see."

"Well, what else, Letsom?" cried Tod. "You have told us no news about anybody yet."

"Because there's none to tell."

"How do those two old dames get on—the Dennets?"

"Oh, they are gone off to some baths in Germany for a twelvemonth, with suppressed gout, and their house is let to a mysterious tenant."

"Mysterious in what way?"

"Well, nobody sees her, and she keeps the doors bolted and barred. The Dennets left it all in Mrs. Cramp's hands, being intimate with her, for they started in a hurry, and she put it into a new agent's hands at Worcester, and he put an advertisement in the papers. Some lady answered it, a stranger; she agreed to all conditions by letter, took possession of the house, and has shut herself up as if something uncanny were inside it. Mrs. Cramp does not like it at all; and queer rumours are beginning to go about."

"What's her name?"

"Nobody knows."

The house spoken of was North Villa, where Jacob Chandler used to live. When the Chandlers went down in the world it was taken on lease by the Miss Dennets, two steady middle-aged sisters.

The first visit we paid the following morning was to Oxlip Grange, to see Coralie. Meeting the Squire on the way he said he would go with us. North Villa lies not far from us, soon after you turn into the Islip road, and the Grange is about a quarter of a mile farther on. I took a good stare at the villa in passing. Two of the upstairs windows were open, but the mysterious tenant was not to be seen.

Old Ozias was in the Grange garden, helping the gardener; it was how he professed to fill up his time; and the door was opened by a tall, smart maid, with curled hair and pink bows in her cap. Where had I seen her?—Why, at the lodgings in the Marylebone Road in London! She was Maria, who had been housemaid there during the enacting of that tragedy.

Coralie Fontaine sat in her pretty parlour, one opening from the large drawing-room, flirting a paper hand-screen between her face and the fire; which she would have, as Sir Dace used to, whether it might be cold weather or hot. Small and pale, her black hair smooth and silky, her dark eyes meeting ours honestly, her chin pointed, her pretty teeth white, she was not a whit changed. Her morning dress was white, with scarlet ribbons, and she was downright glad to see us. The Squire inquired after Verena.

"She is quite well," replied Coralie. "At least, she would be but for grumbling."

"What has she to grumble about, my dear?"

"Nothing," said Coralie.

"Then why does she do it? Dear me! Is her husband not kind to her?"

Coralie laughed at the notion. "He is too kind, Mr. Todhetley. Kindness to people is George Bazalgette's weakness, especially to Verena. Her grievance lies in George's sister, Magnolia Bazalgette."

"What a splendacious name!" interrupted Tod. "Magnolia!"

"She was named after the estate, Magnolia Range; a very beautiful place and one of the finest properties on the island," said Coralie. "Magnolia lives with George; it was always her home, you see; and Verena does not take kindly to her. She complains that Magnolia domineers over the household and over herself. It is just one of Verena's silly fancies; she always wants to be first and foremost; and I have written her one or two sharp letters."

"Coralie," I said here, "is not the girl, who showed us in, Maria?—she who used to live in those lodgings in London?"

Coralie nodded. "The last time I was staying in London, Maria came to me, saying she had left her place and was in want of one. I engaged her at once. I like the girl."

"She is an uncommonly smart girl in the way of curls and caps," remarked Tod.

"I like smart people about me," laughed Coralie.

Who should come in then but Mrs. Cramp. *She* was smart. A flounced gown of shiny material, green in one light, red in another, and a purple bonnet with white strings. She was Stephen Cramp's widow, formerly Mary Ann Chandler; and her speech was honest and homely, and her comely face wore a look of perplexity.

"I don't much like the look of things down yonder," she began, nodding her head in the direction of North Villa: and as she sat down her flounces went up, displaying her white cotton stockings and low, tied shoes. "I have been calling there again, and I can't get in."

"Nobody can get in," said Coralie.

"They have put a chain on the door, and they answer people through it. No chain was ever there before, as long as I have known the house. I paid no attention to the things people were saying," continued Mrs. Cramp; "but I did not much like something I heard last night. I'll see the lady, I said to myself this morning, and down to the house I went, walked up the garden, and ——"

"But what is it that people have been saying, Mrs. Cramp?" struck in the Squire. "These boys have heard something or other."

"What's said is, that there's something queer about the lady," replied Mrs. Cramp. "I can't make it out myself, Squire. Some people say she's pig-faced."

"*Pig-faced!*"

"Well, they do. Last night I heard she was black. And, putting two and two together, as one can't help doing in such a case, I don't like that report at all."

The Squire stared—and began thinking. He believed he knew what Mrs. Cramp meant.

"Well, I went there, and rang," she resumed. "And they opened

the door a couple of inches and talked to me over the chain: some sour-faced woman-servant of middle age. I told her I had come to see my tenant—her mistress; she answered that her mistress could not be seen, and shut the door in my face."

Mrs. Cramp untied her white-satin bonnet strings, tilted back her bonnet, caught up the painted fan, fellow to the one Coralie was handling, and fanned herself while she talked.

"As long as it was said the lady was pig-faced and hid herself from people's eyes accordingly, I thought little of it, you understand, Squire; but if she is black, that's a different matter. It sets one fearing that some scandal may come of it. The Miss Dennets would drop down in a fit on the spot if they heard *that* person had got into their house."

Coralie laughed.

"Ah, my dear, you careless young people make jokes of things that would fret us old ones to fiddle-strings," reproved Mrs. Cramp. "The four Indians may be with her, you know, and most likely are, concealed in cupboards. You don't know what such desperate characters might do—break into your house here some dark night and kill you in your bed. It is not a pleasant thing, is it, Squire?"

"That it's not, if it be as you put it," assented he, growing hot.

"Look here, Mrs. Cramp," interposed Tod. "If the lady has never been seen, how can it be known she is black, or pig-faced?"

"I've never treated the pig-faced report as anything but rubbish," answered Mrs. Cramp; "but I'll tell you, Mr. Joseph, how it has come out that she's black. I heard from Susan Dennet yesterday morning, and she asked whether any letters were lying at home for her or Mary. So I sent my servant Peggy last evening to inquire—a stupid thing of a girl she is, comes from over beyond Bromyard. Peggy went to the kitchen door—and they've got a chain there as well as to the other—and was told that no letters had come for the Miss Dennets. It was getting dark, and Peggy, who had never been on the premises before, mistook the path, and got into one that took her to the latticed arbour. Many a time have I sat there in poor Jacob's days, with the Malvern Hills in the distance."

"So have I, Mary Ann," added the Squire, calling her unconsciously by her Christian name, his thoughts back in the time when they were boy and girl together.

"Peggy found her mistake then, and was turning back, when there stood in her path a black woman, who must have followed her down: black face, black hands, all black. What's more, she was wrapped round in yellow; a *shroud*, Peggy declares, but the girl was quite beyond herself with fright, and could not be expected to know shrouds from cloaks in the twilight. The woman stood stock still, never speaking, only staring; and Peggy tore back in her terror, and fell into the arms of a railway porter, just then bringing a parcel from the station. 'Goodness help us!' she shrieked out, 'there's a

blackamore in the path yonder :' and the girl came home more dead than alive. That is how I've learnt the mysterious lady is black," summed up Mrs. Cramp; "and knowing what we do know, I don't like it."

Neither did the Squire. And Mrs. Cramp departed in a flutter. We all liked her, in spite of her white stockings and shoes.

Some few months before this, a party of strangers appeared one morning at Worcester, and took handsome lodgings there. Four fashionable-looking gentlemen, with dark skins and darker hair; natives, apparently, of some remote quarter of the globe, say Asia or Africa, whose inhabitants are of a fine copper colour; and one lady, understood to be their sister, who was darker than they were—almost quite black. Two rather elderly and very respectable English servants, man and wife, were in their train. They lived well, these people, regardless of cost: had sumptuous dishes on their table, choice fruits, hot-house flowers. They made no acquaintance whatever in the town, rarely went abroad on foot, but took an airing most days in a large old rumbling open barouche, supplied by the livery stables. Worcester, not less alive to curiosity than is any other city, grew to be all excitement over these people, watched their movements with admiration, and called them "The Indians." The lady was seen in the barouche but once, enveloped in a voluminous yellow mantle, the hood of which was drawn over her face. It transpired that she was not in good health, and one evening, when she had a fainting-fit, a doctor was called in to her His report to the town the next day was that she was really a coloured woman, very much darker than her brothers, with the manners and culture of a lady, but strikingly reserved. After a sojourn of about two months, the party, servants and all, quitted their lodgings, giving the landlady only an hour's notice, to spend, as they gave out, a week at Malvern. They paid their bill in full, asked permission to leave two or three of their heaviest trunks with her, and departed.

But they did not go to Malvern. It was not discovered where they did go. Nothing more was seen of them; nothing certain heard. The trunks they had left proved to be empty; some accounts owing in the town came in to be paid. All this looked curious. By-and by a frightful rumour arose—that these people had been mixed up in some dreadful crime: one report said forgery, another murder. It was affirmed that Scotland Yard had been looking for them for months, and that they had disguised themselves as Indians (to quote the word Worcester used) to evade detection. But some observant individuals maintained that they *were* Indians (to use the word again), that no disguise or making-up could have converted their faces to what they were. Nothing more had as yet been heard of them, save that a sum of money, enough to cover the small amount of debts left behind, was transmitted to the landlady anonymously. Excite-

ment had not yet absolutely died away in the town. It was popularly supposed that the Indians were lying concealed in some safe hiding-place, perhaps not far distant.

And now, having disclosed this strange episode, the fame of which had gone about the county, you will be able to understand Mrs. Cramp's consternation. It appeared to be only too probable that the hiding-place was North Villa: of the lady in the yellow mantle, at any rate, whether her four brothers were with her or not.

II.

I SAT, perched on the fence of the opposite field, as though waiting for somebody, whistling softly, and taking crafty looks at North Villa, for our curiosity as to its doings grew with the days, when a fine, broad-shouldered, well-dressed gentleman came striding along the road, flicking his cane.

"Well, Johnny!"

At the first moment I did not know him, I really did not; he looked too grand a gentleman for Benjamin Rymer, too handsome. It was Ben, however. The improvement in him had been going on gradually for some years now; and Ben, in looks, in manner, ay, and in conduct, could hold his own with the best in the land.

"I did not know you were down here," I said, meeting his offered hand. Time was when he would not have presumed to hold out his hand to me unsolicited, boy though I was in those old days: he might have thought nothing of offering it to a nabob now.

"I got down yesterday," said Ben. "Glad enough to have taken my last degree, that of M.D., and to have done with London."

"I thought you did not mean to take a physician's degree."

"I did not, as I chiefly go in for surgery. But when I considered that my life will probably be spent in this country place, almost as a general practitioner, I thought it best to take it. It gives one a standing, you see, Ludlow. And so," he added laughing, "I am Dr. Rymer.——What are you sitting here for, Johnny? Watching that house?"

"Have you heard about it?" I asked.

"Coralie—Miss Fontaine—told me of it when I was with her last evening. Is there anything to be seen?"

"Nothing at all. I have been here for twenty minutes and have not caught a glimpse of anybody, black or white. Yesterday, when Salmon's boy took some grocery there, he saw the black lady peeping at him behind the blind."

"It seems a strange affair altogether," remarked Ben. "The sudden appearance of the people at Worcester, that was strange, as was their sudden disappearance. If it be in truth they who are hiding themselves here, I can't say much for their wisdom: they are too near to the old scene."

"I wonder you don't set up in London," I said to Ben as we walked onwards.

"It is what I should like to do of all things," he replied in a tone of eagerness, "and confine my practice wholly to surgery. But my home must be here. Circumstances are stronger than we are."

"Will it be at Oxlip Grange?" I quietly asked.

Ben turned his head to study my face, and what he read there told tales. "I see," he said, "you know. Yes, it will be at Oxlip Grange. That has been settled a long while past."

"I wish you every happiness; all good luck."

"Thank you, Johnny."

We were nearing the place in question when Mrs. Cramp turned out of its small iron gate, that stood beside the ornamental large ones, in her bewitching costume of green and purple. "And how are you, Mr. Benjamin?" she asked. "Come down for good?"

"Yes."

"And he is Dr. Rymer now, Mrs. Cramp," I added.

"I am glad to hear it," said she warmly, "and I'll shake your hand on the strength of it," and she gave his hand a hearty shake. "At one time you said you never would take a doctor's degree."

"So I did," said Ben. "But somebody wished me to take it."

"Your mother, I guess,"—though, for my part, I did not suppose it was his mother. "Any way, you'll do well now."

"I hope so," answered Ben. "You look flustered, Mrs. Cramp."

"I'm more flustered than I care to be; I am living in a chronic state of fluster," avowed Mrs. Cramp. "It's over that tenant of mine: that woman down yonder," pointing towards North Villa.

"Why should you fluster yourself over her?" he remonstrated. "She is not your tenant."

"Indeed but she is my tenant. To all intents and purposes she is my tenant. The Miss Dennets left the house in my hands."

"How was it you did not have references with her, Mrs. Cramp?"

"That donkey of an agent never asked for any," retorted she. "He was thrown off his guard, he says, by her sending him the first month's rent in advance, and telling him she had only one or two old servants, and no children, and the furniture would be as much cared for as if it were made of gold. Last night she sends to me the advance rent for next month, though it's not due for two days yet, and that has flustered me, I can tell you, Mr. Benjamin, for I was hoping she'd not pay, and that I might be able to get her out. I am now going there with the receipt, and to try again to get to see her: the woman who left the money never waited for one. Afraid of being catechised, I take it."

Picking up her green skirts she sailed down the road. Coralie Fontaine was leaning over the little gate, and opened it as we approached. A beautiful cashmere shawl, all scarlet and gold, contrasted with her white dress, and her drooping gold ear-drops glittered

in the autumn sun. She made a dainty picture, and I saw Dr. Benjamin's enraptured eyes meet hers. If they were not over head and ears in love with one another, never you trust me again.

"Mrs. Cramp is in a way," cried Coralie, as we strolled with her up the garden, amidst its old-fashioned flowers, all bloom and sweetness. "I'm sure that black lady is as good as a play to us."

"News came to me this morning from my sister," said Benjamin. "She and the Archdeacon are coming home; he has not been well, and has got six months' leave of absence."

"Do they bring the children?" asked Coralie.

"As if they'd leave *them!* Why, Coralie, those two small damsels are the very light of Margaret's eyes—to judge by her letters; and of Sale's too, I shouldn't wonder. Margaret asks me to take lodgings for them. I think Mrs. Boughton's might be large enough—where Sale lodged in the old days."

"Lodgings!" indignantly exclaimed Coralie. "I do think you Europeans, you English, are the most inhospitable race on the face of the earth! Your only sister, whom you have not seen for years, of whom you are very fond, is coming back to her native place with her husband and children for a temporary stay, and you can talk of putting them into lodgings? For shame, Benjamin!"

"But what else am I to do?" questioned he, good-humouredly laughing at her. "I have but one bed-room and one sitting-room of my own, the two about as large as a good-sized clothes-closet; I cannot invite a man and his wife and two children to share them, and he an archdeacon! There'd not be space to turn round in."

"Let them come here," said Coralie.

"Thank you," he said, after a few moments' hesitation: and it struck me he might be foreseeing difficulties. "But—they will not be here just yet."

He had some patients at Islip, and went on thither; I said adieu to Coralie and walked homewards, thinking of the ups and downs of life. Presently Mrs. Cramp's green gown loomed into view; her face red, her bonnet awry. I saw she had not met with luck.

"No, I have *not*," she said. "I walked up into their porch as bold as you please, Johnny Ludlow, and I knocked and I rang, letting 'em think it was the Queen come, if they would. And when the woman with the sour face opened the door an inch, she just took the receipt from me; but as to seeing her mistress, I might as well have asked to see the moon. And I heard a scuffle, as if people were listening. Oh, it's those Indians: trust me for that."

Away she went, without further ceremony, and I went back to the ups and downs of earthly life.

It was not so very long ago that Thomas Rymer had lain on his death-bed, brought to it by the troubles of the world, and by the anxiety for his children, for whom no career seemed to present itself, save that of hard, mean, hopeless drudgery: if not something worse

for Benjamin. But how things had changed ! Benjamin, pulling himself up from his ill-doings, was—what he was. A man respected; clever, distinguished, with probably a great career of usefulness before him, and about to be married to a charming girl of large fortune. While Margaret, whom her father had so loved, so pitied, was the wife of a man high in the church, and happy as a queen. For, as you have gathered, the Reverend Isaac Sale, who had given up Herbert Tanerton's humble curacy to go out as chaplain to the Bahama Islands, had been made into an Archdeacon. Ups and downs, ups and downs! they make the sum and substance of existence. Glancing at the blue sky, over which fleecy white clouds were softly drifting, I lost myself in wondering whether Thomas Rymer could look down and still see his children here.

The chemist's shop at Timberdale had been sold by Benjamin Rymer to the smart young man who had carried it on during his absences, one James Boom, said to be Scotch. Benjamin had his rooms there at present; good-sized closets, he has just called them; and took his meals with Mr. Boom. Mrs. Rymer, the mother (having appropriated all the purchase-money), had set up her home in Birmingham amidst her old friends and relatives, and Benjamin had covenanted to allow her money yearly from his practice.

Public commotion increased. It spread to Oxlip Grange. One night, Ozias was sitting back amidst the laurels at the side of the house to smoke his pipe, when Maria came out to ask him what he had done with the best tea-tray, which they couldn't find. As she stood a moment while he reflected, there came two figures softly creeping round from the front—women. One wore a close bonnet and full dark cloak, the other was altogether enveloped in some shapeless garment that might be yellow by day-light, out of which a jet-black face and jet-black hands shone conspicuously in the rays of the stars. Maria, very much frightened, grasped hold of the old man's shoulder.

The pipe trembled in his hand: he had a mortal dread of assassins and housebreakers. "No speaky, no speaky," whispered he. "We watch, you and me. They come hurt Missee."

The figures made for the lighted window of the large drawing-room, which was at the end of this side of the house. Coralie was sitting alone inside it, expecting visitors to tea. The blind was not drawn quite down, and they stooped to peer in, and remained there as if glued to the window. Maria could stand it no longer; but in creeping away, she rustled the laurels frightfully: we are sure to make the most noise, you know, when we want to be silent. The women looked round, and there came from them a rattling hiss, like that of a snake. With a scream, Maria made for the refuge of the kitchen-door; Ozias flew after her, dropping his pipe.

It must have disturbed the women. For just about then, when

the Squire, holding my arm, arrived at Miss Fontaine's gate, they were coming out: two disguised figures, who went swiftly down the road.

"Mercy be good to us!" cried the Squire, aghast. He had drawn back in politeness to let them pass through the gate, and had found the black face come nearly into contact with his own. "Johnny, lad, that must be Mrs. Cramp's tenant and her servant!"

They brushed past Mrs. Todhetley coming along with Tod. Maria and Ozias were in the drawing-room when we got in, talking like wild things. The other guests soon arrived: Dr. Rymer, Mrs. Cramp, and Tom Chandler and his wife from Islip. Ozias gave an opinion that Missee (meaning Coralie) was about to be assassinated in her bed.

At this Coralie laughed. She had no fear; but she did not like it. "I cannot see what they could possibly want, looking in at me!" she cried. "It was very rude."

"They want Missee's diamonds," spoke Ozias. "Missee got great lot beauty diamonds, lot other beauty jewels; black woman come in this night—next night—after night—who know which—and smother Missee and take dem all."

Poor Mrs. Cramp, sitting in the biggest arm-chair, her sandalled shoes stretched on a footstool, was quite taken out of herself with dismay. The Squire rubbed his face incessantly, asking what was to be done. Dr. Rymer said nothing in regard to what was to be done; but he gave his head an emphatic nod, as if he knew.

The next morning he presented himself at North Villa, and asked to see the tenant of it. The woman servant denied him—over the guarding chain. Ben insisted upon his card and his request being taken in. After a battle of words, she took them in, shutting the door in his face the while; and the doctor cooled his heels in the porch for five minutes. As she drew the door open again, he caught sight of a black face twisted round the sitting-room door-post to peep at him, a black hand, with rings on it, grasping it. She saw him looking at her, and disappeared like a shot. The message brought out by the servant was that her mistress was an invalid, unable to see visitors: if Dr. Rymer had any business with her, he must be good enough to convey it by letter.

"Very well," said the Doctor, in his decisive way: "I warn you and your mistress not again to intrude on Miss Fontaine's premises, as you did last night. If you do, you must take the consequences."

At this, the woman stared as if it were so much Greek to her. She answered that she had not been on Miss Fontaine's premises, then or ever; had not been out of doors at all the previous night. And Ben thought by her tone she was speaking truth.

"It was one of those Indian brothers disguised in a cloak and bonnet," said we all when we heard this. And Coralie's servants took to watch through the livelong night at the upper windows, turn and turn about, growing thin from dread of the assassins.

Altogether, what with one small item and another, Mrs. Cramp's tenant kept us alive. A belief had prevailed that the woman-servant was the same who had attended the Indians; but this was dispelled. A housemaid of ours, Nancy, a flighty sort of girl, often in hot water with her elders thereby, whose last service had been with old Lawyer Cockermouth, at Worcester, was out on an errand when she met this woman and recognised her for an old acquaintanee. During Nancy's service with the lawyer she had been there as the cook-housekeeper.

"It is Sarah Stone, ma'am, and nobody else!" cried Nancy, running in to tell the news to Mrs. Todhetley. "She left for her temper, soon after I left; I heard say that old Miss Cockermouth wouldn't put up with it any longer."

"Are you sure it is the same, Nancy?" asked Mrs. Todhetley.

"Why, ma'am, I know Sarah Stone as well as I know my own mother. 'What, is it *you* that's living here with that there black lady?' I says to her. 'What is it to you whether I'm living with a black lady or a white 'un,' she answers me, all crusty: 'just mind your own affairs, Nancy Dell.' 'Well,' says I, 'there's a pretty talk about her; it's not me that would like to serve a wild Indian'—and that set Sarah Stone off at a strapping pace, ma'am."

Thus things went on, North Villa seeming to grow more isolated day by day, and its inmates more mysterious. When the rent for the next month was nearly due, Mrs. Cramp found it left at her house as before: and poor Mrs. Cramp felt fit to have a fever.

One evening, early in November, Mr. Cole, the surgeon of Crabb, was seen to go into North Villa. He was seen to go again the following morning, and again in the afternoon, and again in the evening. It transpired that the black lady was alarmingly ill.

Naturally, it put the parish up in arms. We made a rush for Cole, wanting to ask him five hundred things. Cole, skimming along the ground like a lamplighter, evaded us all; and the first to succeed in pouncing upon him was Miss Timmens, the schoolmistress. Very downright and honest, she was in the habit of calling a spade a spade, and poured out her questions one upon another. They had met by the yellow barn.

"Well, no," answers Cole, when he could get a word in, "I don't think that any murderer is at North Villa; do not see one about; but there's a baby." "A baby!" shrieks Miss Timmens, as she pushed back the bunches of black curls from her thin cheeks with their chronic redness, "a baby!" "Yes, a baby," says Cole, "a new baby." "Good mercy!" cries she, "a baby! a black baby! Is it a boy or a girl, Mr. Cole?" "It's a boy," says Cole. "*Good* mercy! a black boy!—what an extraordinary sight it must be!" Cole says nothing to this; only looks at her as meek as a lamb. "And now, between ourselves, Doctor," goes on Miss Timmens, confidentially, "did you see the Indians there?—those men?" "Did not see any man at all," answers Cole; "saw no sign of a man being

there." "Ah, of course they'd take their precautions to keep out of sight," nodded Miss Timmens, thinking old Cole uncommonly stupid to-day. "And how do you relish attending on a black patient, Doctor? And what's she like?" "Why," answers Cole, "black patients are much the same as white ones; have the same number of arms and legs and fingers." "Oh, indeed," says Miss Timmens, quite sharply; and she wishes Cole good-day. And that was the best that could be got out of Cole.

The Doctor's visits were watched with the most intense interest; three times a day at first, then twice a day, then once; and then they ceased altogether.

"Black lady on her legs again?" says Ben Rymer, meeting Cole about this time. "Quite so," answers Cole. "Mind that you get paid, sir," says Ben, with a laugh. "No need to mind that," returns Cole: "five sovereigns were put into my hand when the child was born." "By the black lady?" asks Ben, opening his eyes: for two guineas was the crack fee in our parts. "Yes, it *was* the black lady who gave it me," says Cole with emphasis: "and that, she took care to say, was not to include subsequent attendance. Wish you the same luck in your next case, Rymer."

Rymer thanked him and went off laughing. He was getting on in his practice like a house on fire, his fame rising daily.

"How do you like it—his setting up here?" confidentially questioned the Squire of Darbyshire, the doctor at Timberdale.

"Plenty of room for both of us," replied Darbyshire, "and I am not as young as I was. It rather strikes me, though, Squire, it is not exactly at Timberdale that Rymer will pitch his tent."

The next exciting event had nothing to do with North Villa. It was the arrival of Archdeacon Sale with his wife and children. They did not go to Coralie's. Herbert Tanerton opened his heart, and carried them off to the Rectory from the railway station. That was so like Herbert! Had Sale remained a poor curate he might have gone to the workhouse and taken Margaret with him; being an archdeacon Herbert chose to make much of him. Margaret was not altered, she was loving and gentle as ever; with the same nice face, and poor Thomas Rymer's sad, sweet eyes shining from it.

Of course the first thing confided to the Bahama travellers was the mystery at North Villa. The Archdeacon took a sensible view of it. "As long as the black lady does not molest you," he said, "why trouble yourselves about her?"

After that we had a bit of a lull. Nothing exciting occurred. Save a report that two of the Indians were seen taking the air in the garden of North Villa, each with a formidable stick in his hand. But it turned out that they were two tramps who had gone in to beg.

III.

I THOUGHT it would have come to a quarrel. The Squire maintained his view and Coralie maintained hers. They talked at each other daily, neither giving way.

Christmas Day was approaching, and it had pleased Miss Fontaine to project a sumptuous dinner for it, to be given at Oxlip Grange to all her special friends. The Squire protested he never heard of anything so unreasonable. He did not dine out of his own house on Christmas Day, and she must come to Crabb Cot.

The third week in December had set in, when one evening, as we rose from table, the Squire impulsively declared he would go and finally have it out with her.

Meaning Coralie. Settling himself into his great coat, he called to me to go after him. In the Islip Road we overtook Cole, walking fast also. He had been sent for to the baby at North Villa, he said; and we left him at the gate.

Coralie was in her favourite little parlour, reading by lamp-light. The Squire sat down by the fire in a fluster, and began remonstrating about the Christmas dinner. Coralie only laughed.

"It is unreasonable, dear Mr. Todhetley, even to propose our going to you. Think of the number! I wish to have everybody. The Archdeacon and his wife, and Dr. Rymer, and Mrs. Cramp, and the Letsoms, and Tom Chandler and Emma, and of course, her father, old Mr. Paul, as he is some relation of mine, and——why, that's a carriage driving up! I wonder who has come to-night?"

Another minute, and old Ozias rushed in with a beaming face, hardly able to get his words out for excitement.

"Oh, Missee, Missee, it Massa George; come all over wide seas from home!"—and there entered a fine man with a frank and handsome face—George Bazalgette.

"Where's Verena?" he exclaimed, after kissing Coralie and shaking hands genially with the Squire, though they had never met before.

Coralie looked surprised. "Verena?" she repeated. "Is she not with you?"

"She is not with me; I wish she was. Where is she, Coralie?"

"But how should I know where she is?" retorted Coralie, looking up at Mr. Bazalgette.

"Is she not staying with you?—Did she not come over to you?"

"Certainly not," said Coralie. "I have not seen Verena since she went out, sixteen months ago. Neither have I heard from her lately. What is it that you mean, George?"

George Bazalgette stood back against the book-case, and told us what he meant. Some weeks ago—nay, months—upon returning to Magnolia Range after a week's absence at his other estate across the country, he found Verena flown. She left a note for him, saying she did not get on well with Magnolia, and was going to stay a little while

with Mrs. Dickson. He felt hurt that Verena had not spoken openly to him about Magnolia, but glad that she should have the change, as she had not been well of late. Mrs. Dickson was his aunt and lived in a particularly healthy part of one of the adjoining islands. Time passed on; he wrote to Verena, but got no answer to his letters, and he concluded she was so put out with Magnolia that she would not write. By-and-by he thought it was time to see after her, and journeyed to Mrs. Dickson's. Mrs. Dickson was absent, gone to stay with some friends at St. Thomas, and the servants did not know when she would return. He supposed, as a matter of course, that she had taken Verena with her, and went back home. Still the time passed; no news of Verena, no letters, and he proceeded again to Mrs. Dickson's. Then, to his unbounded astonishment, he found that Verena had only stayed with her one week, and had taken the mail packet for Southampton on her way to stay with her sister at Oxlip Grange. Giving a blessing to Mrs. Dickson for not having written to inform him of all this, and for having kept his letters to Verena by that young lady's arbitrary command, he came off at once to England.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Coralie. "She did not come here."

The fine colour on George Bazalgette's face, which retained its freshness though he did live in a hot climate, lost its brightness.

"She would be the least likely to come here, of all places," pursued Coralie. "In the last answer I ever sent her, after a letter of complaints to me, hinting that she thought of coming here for a time, I scolded her sharply and assured her I should despatch her back to you the next day."

"What am I to do?" he exclaimed. "Where look for her?"

Not caring to intrude longer, we took our departure, the Squire shaking his head dubiously over Mrs. George Bazalgette's vagaries. "It was the same thing," he said, "when she was Verena Fontaine, as you remember, Johnny: and what a good fellow her husband seems to be.——Halloa! Why, that's Cole again!"

He was coming out of North Villa. "You are back soon!" he cried. And we told him of the arrival of George Bazalgette.

Cole seemed to stare with all his eyes as he listened: I could see them in the starlight. "What will he do if he can't find her here?" he asked of me. "Do you know, Johnny Ludlow?"

"Go back by the first and fleetest ship to turn Mrs. Dickson inside-out. He thinks she and Verena have played him a trick in letting him come over. How did you find the black baby?"

"Found nothing the matter with it," grunted Cole. "These young mothers are so fanciful!"

We left him standing against the gate, supposing that he had to go higher up. And what happened then, I can only tell you by hearsay.

Cole, propping his back against the spikes, turned his face up to

the stars, as if he were taking counsel of them. Counsel he needed from somebody or something, for he was in a dilemma.

"Well, I'll chance it," he thought, when he had got pretty cold. "It seems the right thing to do."

Walking briskly to Oxlip Grange, he asked to see Mr. Bazalgette; and after whispering a few words into that gentleman's ear, brought him out to North Villa. "You stand behind me, so as not to be seen," he directed, ringing the bell.

"I'm coming in again," said he to Sarah Stone, when she pulled the door back about an inch. So she undid the chain; the Doctor was privileged; and he slipped in, Mr. Bazalgette behind him. Sarah, the faithful, was for showing fight.

"It is all right," said Cole. "Not yet, sir"—putting out his arm to bar Mr. Bazalgette's passage. "You go in first to your mistress, Sarah, and say that a gentleman is waiting to see her: just landed from the West Indies."

But the commotion had attracted attention, and a young lady, not black, but charmingly white, appeared at the parlour door, a black head behind her.

"George!" she shrieked. And the next moment flew into his arms, sobbing and crying, and kissing him. Cole decamped.

That past evening in November, when Cole got a message that his services were needed at North Villa, he went expecting to be introduced to a black lady. A black lady in truth showed him in; or, to be correct, a lady's black attendant, and he saw—Verena Fontaine.

That is, Verena Bazalgette. She put Cole upon his honour, not to disclose her secret, and told him a long string of her sister-in-law's iniquities, as touching lecturing and domineering, and that she had left home intending to come over for a time to Coralie. Whilst staying with Mrs. Dickson before sailing, a letter was forwarded to her from Magnolia Range. It was from Coralie; and it convinced Verena that Coralie's would be no safe refuge, that she would be sent out of it at once back to her husband. She sailed, as projected, allowing Mrs. Dickson to think she was still coming to her sister. Upon landing at Southampton she went on to a small respectable inn at Worcester, avoiding the larger hotels lest she should meet people who knew her. Seeing the advertisement of North Villa to let, she wrote to the agent, and secured it. To be near Coralie seemed like a protection, though she might not go to her. Next she answered an advertisement from a cook (inserted by Sarah Stone), and engaged her, binding her to secrecy. The woman, though of crusty temper, was honest and trustworthy, and espoused the cause of her young mistress, and was zealously true to her. She carried in to her the various reports that were abroad, of the Indians and the black lady, and all the rest of it; causing Verena bursts of laughter, the only divertisement she got in her imprisoned life: she did not dare to go out lest she should be recognised and

the news carried to Coralie. Dalla, a faithful native servant who had been left in the West Indies and returned to Verena when she married George Bazalgette, attended her on her solitary voyage. She it was who was black, not Verena. And the night they stole into the premises of Oxlip Grange it was done with the hope of getting a sly peep at Coralie's face; both of them were longing for it. Hearing the stir in the shrubs, Dalla had hissed; her thoughts were back in her own land, and it was her mode of startling away four-footed night animals there.

George Bazalgette was very angry with his wife, more especially so at her having absented herself at that uncertain time, and he declared to her that he would put her away from him for good if ever she attempted such a thing again. With tears enough to float a ship, Verena gave him her solemn promise that she never would leave him again. Never again: she had been too miserable this time, and the baby had nearly frightened her to death, for she had not expected him so soon and had meant to go back for it.

The Squire could not hold out now, and the Christmas dinner was at Coralie's. We went over to Timberdale Church in the morning, a lot of us, to hear the Archdeacon preach. Herbert gave up the pulpit to him, taking the prayers himself. He was a plain little man, as you knew before, and he gave us a plain sermon, but it was one of those that are worth their weight in gold. Lady Tenby whispered that to me as we came out. "And oh, Johnny," she said, "we are so glad he has got on! We always liked Isaac Sale."

It was a grand dinner-party, though not as many as Coralie wanted. The Letsoms did not care to leave their own fireside, or old Paul, or the Chandlers. Verena was the life of it, laughing and joking and parading about with her baby, who had been christened "George" the day before, Mrs. Cramp having been asked to be its godmother.

"Which I think was very pretty of them, Mr. Johnny," she said to me after dinner; "and I'm proud of standing to it."

"It was in recompense for the worry I've given you, you dear old thing!" whispered Verena, as she pulled Mrs. Cramp's chair backwards and kissed her motherly forehead. "You'll never have such a tenant again—for worry."

"Never, I hope, please Heaven!" assented Mrs. Cramp. "And I'm sure I shall never see a black woman without shivering. Now, my dear, you just put my chair down; you'll have me backwards. Hold it, will you, Mr. Johnny!"

"What dishes of talk you'll get up about me with Susan Dennet!" went on Verena, the chair still tilted. "We are going back home the beginning of the year, do you know. George got his letters to-day."

"And what about that young lady over there—that Miss Magnolia?" asked Mrs. Cramp.

Verena let the chair fall in ecstasy, and her tone was brimful of delight. "Oh, that's the best news of all! Magnolia is going to be married; she only waits for George to get back to give her away. I must say this is a delightful Christmas Day!"

On the thirty-first of December, the last day in the year, Coralie was married to Dr. Rymer. Archdeacon Sale, being Benjamin's brother-in-law, came over to Islip Church to tie the knot. *Her* brother-in-law, George Bazalgette, gave her away. The breakfast was held at Coralie's, Verena presiding in sky-blue satin.

And amidst the company was a lady some of us had not expected to see—Mrs. Rymer. She had scarlet ringlets (white feathers setting them off to-day) and might be vulgar to her fingers' ends, but she was Benjamin's mother, and Coralie had privately sent for her.

"You have my best wishes, Mr. Benjamin," said the Squire, drawing Ben aside while Coralie was putting on her travelling attire; "and I'd be glad with all my heart had your father lived to see it."

"So should I be, Squire."

"Look here," whispered the Squire, holding him by the button-hole, "did you ever tell her of that—that—you know—that past trouble?"

"Of the bank-note you mean," said Ben. "I told her of that long ago, and everything else that could tell against me. Believe me, Mr. Todhetley, though my faults were many in the days gone by, I could not act dishonourably by my dear wife; no, nor by any-one else now."

The Squire nodded with a beaming face, and pressed Ben's hand.

"And let me thank you now, sir, for your long-continued kind-ness, your expressions of esteem for my poor father and of goodwill to me," said Ben, with emotion. "I have not talked of it, but I have felt it."

They started away in their new close carriage, amid a shower of rice and old shoes; and we finished up the revels in the ev ening with a dance and a fiddle, the Squire leading out Mrs. Cramp. Then came a cold supper.

The noise had reached its height, and the champagne was going about, when the Squire interrupted with a "Hush, hush!" and the babel ceased. The clock on the mantelpiece was striking twelve. As the last stroke vibrated on the air, its echo alone breaking the silence, the Squire rose and lifted his hands:

"A Happy New Year to us all, my friends! May God send His best blessings with it!"

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

It may as well be added, in the interests of peace and quietness, that those Indians had not committed any crime at all; it had been invented by rumour, as Worcester discovered later. They were only inoffensive strangers, travelling about to see the land.

TO A COMET.

FAR in the midnight sky,
In the deep silence of the summer night,
Whitening the heavens with its pallid ray
It steals upon my sight.

Solemn upon the heart
Falls the strange influence of that wanderer's beam
Like some pale phantom from the unknown world
Or spirit of a dream.

Vainly my thoughts would trace
The awful circle of its wondrous way,
Or fathom the far wilderness of space
Marked by its ghostlike ray.

Where are the forms that moved
On our poor earth, oh! wanderer on high;
Where the high-bounding hearts that lived and loved
When thou before wert nigh?

Long have they passed away,
And perished like the memory of a dream:
The untaught eyes which, wondering, gazed of yore
On thy pale spectral beam.

Now on our native earth
Others are mustering for the battle-strife;
Bold spirits pant to win their glory-ray,
Or yield their transient life.

Few years—and they shall lie
With the past generations of the dead,
E'en like yon meteor swift gliding by,
Bright—glittering—faded—fled.

And thou wilt come again,
E'en where thy train of misty light *now* waves
And from the solemn night of years to come
Wilt shine upon our graves.

Yet in our fleeting breasts,—
Oh! glorious stranger of the northern sky,—
Dwell sparks whose orbit is eternity:
Souls that can never die.

When all yon kingly stars,
Which sit so proudly on their thrones to-night,
Seeming immortal with their steadfast eyes,
So still—so calm—so bright—

When all those starry kings,
Like fading tapers, one by one, shall wane,
Our souls, our trembling souls, so transient here,
Shall rise—shall live again,

Farewell! may He who made
Man for endeavour, and the stars to shine,
Be with thee on thy solitary path,
And guide me safe through mine!

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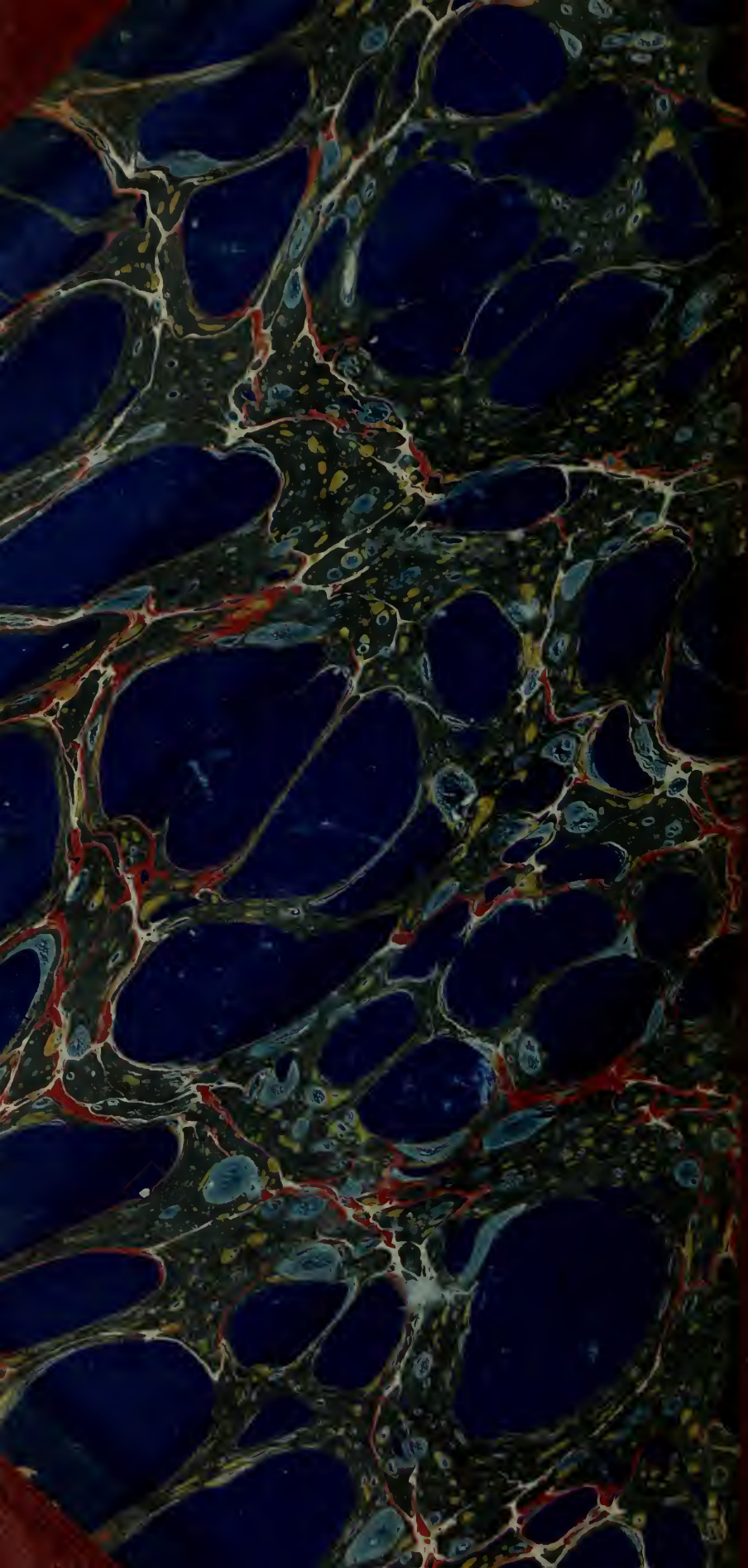
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